

Czeslaw Milosz: Themes

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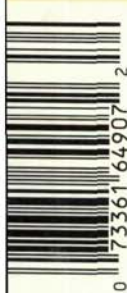
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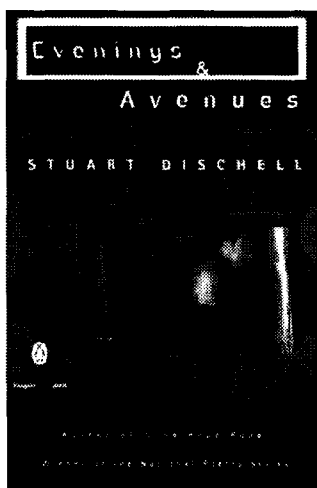
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COMMENTS

Conor Cruise O'Brien's new book, *On the Eve of the Millennium* (Free Press), which consists of four lectures given at the University of Toronto, is a *fin de siècle*, gloomy forecast of the future. But on the road to his main thesis, O'Brien wanders off in various directions, where he produces some interesting and fairly original observations.

But the leading idea of the book is that of a dark future, at least for the West. (It is interesting to note that many of the contributions to a recent symposium in *Commentary* on the future of America also took a pessimistic view of American prospects.) The main threat to its continuing stability and prosperity is from the so-called third world, which O'Brien thinks will try to blackmail the West into sharing its wealth. Its main weapons are terrorism and overwhelming immigration to Western Europe and America. But, unlike the soft liberals who advocate concessions, O'Brien resolutely advocates firm resistance to pressure from terrorists and acts of terrorism – though tempered by moderate social and political aid. Interestingly, O'Brien calls not only for toughness, but also for a certain amount of hypocrisy mixed with some self-awareness on the part of the West.

O'Brien also believes that the monarchy in England will be abolished, and with its end, British democracy is bound to break down. In fact, O'Brien thinks that Western democracy is a fragile institution and perhaps a temporary political form in the long history of humanity.

Culturally, O'Brien deplores the invasion of the academy by post-modern political correctness, which he insists corrupts intellectual and political thinking. He thinks, somewhat optimistically in this case, that the corrosive influence might disappear sometime in the next century. But his forecast in this area, unlike his other glimpses into the future, is quite tentative.

To my knowledge, O'Brien makes a fairly original comment on the irony of Jefferson's liberal reputation, which is regarded as a political legend. O'Brien notes that Jefferson owned one hundred and fifty slaves, that he only partly condemned the institution of slavery, and even then mostly later in his life. Yet Jefferson has become an icon of liberalism for contemporary progressives – perhaps mainly because Jefferson wrote the American Constitution.

Another observation that, so far as I know, is somewhat original is O'Brien's argument about the advocacy of democracy in South America and elsewhere. O'Brien insists that the United States is not so much interested in democracy as in the limitation of immigration into America.

O'Brien cites this as an example of American hypocrisy – to which he is not entirely opposed – though it seems to me to some extent a typical example of the American tendency to cloak all its foreign policies in a liberal and moral disguise.

O'Brien also makes a telling point – which if not totally original is quite apt – about the politics of popularity. He sees American presidents more and more substituting popularity for principles, and divides them on this basis. Thus he cites Washington, Lincoln, and Franklin Roosevelt as those who did not stray from their ideas to gain popularity, while he castigates Clinton as a captive of popular appeal.

O'Brien makes an observation I have not seen anywhere: that Hitler was extremely intelligent. This would explain why Hitler's attempted rebellion was only a symbolic one, in preparation for later events. It also would explain Hitler's mesmeric influence on so many people.

There are, however, some questionable points in O'Brien's exposition. For example, I think he has too broad a conception of art, which verges precariously on postmodernism. Thus O'Brien relates art to spectacle and ritual, which actually is an idea of art based on early tribal practices.

Also questionable is O'Brien's citation of Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin for their predictive prowess. He mentions only one instance of their ability to look ahead, but fails to note that all three did not realize that their version of dictatorial socialism could not work and would lead to barbaric practices. However, O'Brien's general discussion of the question of prediction is quite suggestive, and he has an excellent account of Edmund Burke's remarkable foresight into the darker consequences of the French Revolution.

On the whole, O'Brien's lectures have a wealth of robust insight into culture and politics. And his prose, while not elegant, is clear and direct.

Despite the recent revelations about T. S. Eliot's anti-Semitism, we are publishing in this issue several of his early poems that have not appeared before. Eliot's anti-Semitism has been known for a long time. Some of it appeared in his early short poems; and there was a reference in a talk he gave at the University of Virginia, where he mentioned that there were too many free-thinking Jews. But it is generally agreed that his anti-Semitism was not virulent. In addition, he was probably the greatest poet of the twentieth century, and it is obviously desirable to know as much about him as possible.

There is of course the difficult question of anti-Semitism which was to be found in a number of Western writers. And unless we reject a significant part of Western literature, we have, to some extent, to separate personal prejudices from literary quality. Otherwise, we find ourselves in

the strange company of the politically correct assault on the culture of the past.

COMMENDATIONS *Love, Again* by Doris Lessing is a subtle, complex and gripping narrative. It is a story within a story of the varieties of love: unrequited, disastrous, suffering, and wistful. The central characters are a dead woman, a mulatto, the victim of racially denied fulfillment of love, and a woman widowed some years ago, and now doomed to love again. The novel tolls all the bells of possible and imaginary love.

Gerald Holton's new book about science, *Einstein: History and Other Passions* (Addison-Wesley), is divided into two parts: the first is a tribute to the achievement of science in Western civilization; the second is an acknowledgment of Einstein's outstanding scientific achievements and his dedication to the values of scientific thought. It is a refreshing antidote to the current assaults on the very idea of scientific truth and of the importance of science in the development of the West.

Roger Shattuck's excellent book, *Forbidden Knowledge: From Prometheus to Pornography* (St. Martin's Press), traces the theme through literature, science, and technology. His exposition runs from Genesis through Milton, Dickinson, Goethe, Melville, Camus, and the Marquis de Sade, and from the early bans on scientific knowledge to the controversies over the atom bomb and DNA research. He illustrates superbly the tensions between human curiosity and the consequences of knowing too much, elucidating the many dilemmas and ambivalences, and avoiding taking easy sides.

DIANA TRILLING

Diana Trilling belonged to the first generation of New York intellectuals. She contributed very outstanding pieces to *Partisan Review*. Her first major essay, "Men, Women and Sex," appeared in *Partisan Review* in 1950, and the last, "Goronwy and Others: A Remembrance of England," in 1996.

Diana Trilling was a complex person. She had a magisterial manner. In the early days, she was a staunch and ardent anti-Communist. This no longer was uppermost in her work in the last years, but she continued to be anti-Communist – though she was mostly an adversary of the post-modern ideologies.

I frequently differed with Diana, mostly on political matters, and occasionally on literary ones. But we remained friends to the end. For, despite

our differences, which we enjoyed arguing about, there was a good deal of warmth underneath our disagreements. And we both tried to live by the principle that unless the issues were crucial, our friendship ought not be affected. And whether one agreed or disagreed with her, she remained a cultural force.

As a matter of fact, Diana's politics mellowed considerably toward the end of her life. Both she and Lionel were quite conservative earlier on. Indeed, they had what might be called conservative instincts. But in recent years Diana was critical of the neoconservatives. Actually, I think she tended to play down Lionel's conservatism, insisting that he was essentially a liberal – which seems to me questionable unless one thinks of him as a liberal in the most traditional sense of the term.

Lionel's life was remote and largely unknown even to his friends, as though he were a legend. His students admired him, and Diana humanized him by writing of his blemishes as well as his virtues. Indeed, she spent a good part of her life after his death fiercely defending him against his personal and political critics.

We shall miss Diana's great candor, her insistence on the highest of standards, her loyalty to her family and friends, and her sincerity. But most of all, I miss our friendly squirmishes that ultimately cemented our friendship.

W. P.

I had met Diana Trilling a number of times, at various functions, at gatherings at William Phillips's house, and at Columbia University. But I first came face-to-face with her in 1984, at the fiftieth anniversary celebration of *Partisan Review*. By then, I was executive editor. Towards the end of the evening, a journalist began to ask me some things. Diana was nearby, and apparently noticed that I was hesitant, still not used to giving sharp answers to pointed questions. She grabbed the mike from me, and told that reporter what she thought he ought to hear. I was dismayed, thought her rude, especially when, after handing back the mike she turned to me by saying, "that's how you do it." However, after that incident we became friends. She had taught me a lesson I needed to learn, and I respected her for it.

None of Diana's friends would be surprised at this "typical Diana story." They all knew of her need to get things absolutely right. She could not bear sloppiness or imprecision especially in thinking and expression. In the course of many a dinner, she would stop herself in the middle of a juicy story: "No, that's not exactly right, what I mean is – come on, some-

body, give me the correct word.” Usually, she’d find it herself.

Diana’s formidable intellect and accomplishments were matched by her voracious appetite for gossip, not maliciously, but to better grasp her friends’ foibles. She was truly concerned about them, and speculated about what might be motivating their behavior. Yet she did not simply divert with a juicy anecdote, which she often announced in a phone conversation – to be told during the following visit. At the same time, Diana refrained from divulging secrets that might end up hurting someone. She sympathized with every jilted lover, with everyone who’d been treated unjustly, even with those she had stopped talking to – on both the right and the left – and who no longer shared her politics. Underneath all of her swagger and bravado, her pronouncements and postures, she was exceedingly vulnerable, occasionally suppressing hurtful tears at being misread or misunderstood.

We got close during our many dinners and get-togethers, first in Wellfleet and then in New York. That was when I learned about the ins and outs of the early days around *Partisan Review*, as William Phillips and Diana reconstructed specific events, sometimes disagreeing on who said what, and at what moment, but doing so in order to “get it right” rather than just to be right.

One evening last July, while making changes on her last essay for *The New Yorker*, Diana told me how pleased she was to have been able to support herself after having been widowed at the age of seventy. “After this bout with cancer,” she added matter-of-factly, “I may live for another six years or die in six weeks, but whatever happens, I feel freer than I ever have before.” At her funeral, which Diana apparently had wished to be stark and impersonal, it was clear that her numerous friends, many of them much younger than she, felt her death as a deep personal loss. I miss Diana’s peals of laughter, her instant sympathy, and her friendship. Summers will not be the same without her.

E. K.

DIANA TRILLING

1905-1996

An Early Friend and Contributor

Themes

Carrying a Splinter

Every year he would ponder what he had been spared, and that was enough to give him happiness. For when he illegally crossed the border, the same thing could have happened to him, that befell a classmate of his from the Sigismundus Augustus High School, who was to spend sixteen years in the gulags. Indeed, a leading motive of his long life has been imagining the fate of his Wilno peers in the labor camps and mines of Vorkuta, though the authors of his biographies were not aware of this. He identified himself with prisoners of polar night and hence his ecstatic gratitude for every sunrise and every slice of bread. Yet precisely because of this he carried a splinter of resentment towards the so-called people of the West. He was unable to forgive not only their intellectuals, always on the lookout for a perfect tyranny, provided it was far from their homes, but also all the citizens of those countries, united by their common refusal to know.

He asked himself, though, what to do with this splinter. The most honest behavior would have been to take upon oneself the task of publicly proclaiming the truth. Unfortunately, the Empire of the Lie was powerful, and simple-minded collectors of facts could not do anything against it, since their terrifying revelations were branded as madmen's hallucinations. Thus a more clever tactic was needed. Some bearers of the splinter would decide to serve the Empire, to take in that manner a revenge on the villainous politicians of the West. He, however, after many hesitations, chose something else. He learned to pretend for years that he, as befits a worshipper of the intellect, was cultured, progressive, tolerant, permissive, until he became one of their luminaries, even while he carried his knowledge which he would not reveal. And when his books gained fame and the analyses were written, no literary critic would guess that behind their philosophical meditations stood the image of sufferings crying to Heaven for vengeance. Only the memory of Vorkuta prisoners could provide an unshakable measure to distinguish good from evil, and whoever applied it was more dangerous to the monster State than regiments and armies.

Coming Off

What I am going to say will be understood by those of us who have lived such a moment: for instance during an historical upheaval, when the life of a human society suddenly reveals its unsuspected traits. Since there have been in this century a number of historical upheavals, many people

have had the experience.

It happens that we may walk, watch, be tormented by our compassion or anger, and suddenly realize that what we are seeing, all that reality, is beyond words. That is, there is nothing about it in newspapers, books, communiqués, nothing in poetry, fiction, or pictures on the screen. From reality which is homely, perceived in a most ordinary way, another one, autonomous, enclosed in language, has come off. Astonished, we ask ourselves: is it a dream? A fatamorgana? The fabric of signs of speech envelops us like a cocoon and proves to be strong enough to make us doubt the testimony of our senses.

Such an experience does not incline us favorably towards literature. It compels us to ask for realism, which usually leads to pseudo-realism or for a veracity nobody could bear. In the nineteenth century it was said about the novel that it should be a “mirror carried on a highway” but “realistic” novels lied without scruple, clearing from the field of vision subjects recognized as undesirable or forbidden. The true London of nineteenth-century capitalism hardly exists in the novel, except a few pages of Dickens, but what that Babylon of misery and prostitution was, seen through the eyes of a foreigner in 1862, we may learn from Dostoevsky’s *Winter Notes On Summer Impressions*.

The twentieth century brought a fictitious reality constructed by the political will. It was as a screen painted with “scenes from life” to hide what was going on in back. It was called socialist realism. Yet orders and prohibitions of the State are only one of the possible causes of this division into the seen and the described. The fabric of language has a constant propensity to come off from reality, and our efforts to glue them together are in most cases futile – yet absolutely necessary.

Mrs. Darwin

Before Charles Darwin published in 1859 his work *On the Origin of Species*, he had to hear many reproaches from his wife, a deeply religious person, who could not accept his decision to send to the printer so noxious a book.

– Charles, she would say, God has told us that He created man in His image and likeness. He did not say that about the ant, the bird, or the ape, or the dog or the cat. He placed man above everything alive and subjected the earth to his dominion. By what right do you deprive of his dignity a being that has the face of God and is equal to angels?

The husband, then, would answer that if he did not do it, Wallace would, since he had hit upon a similar idea.

– Charles – she replied – we should be aware of our motivations. You would not have been so intent on acquiring fame as a scientist, if not for your successive failures. I know you do not like to be reminded of that, but had you succeeded in becoming a physician, as you desired, you would have gotten enough satisfaction by curing people instead of trying to satisfy your ambition at any price. And had those years when you studied theology at Cambridge allowed you to become a minister of the Church, your work in a human community would have protected you from adventurism.

– You know very well where you borrowed your theory. You found it in Malthus. A bad man, Charles, cruel and indifferent to the fate of the poor. I don't believe your theory, for your observations were not made with good intent.

Yes, Charles Darwin had occasion, later, to think of those words of hers, though he was at the same time quite certain that his theory of evolution was correct. So much the worse for me and for humans. The theology that can be drawn from it is nothing else than that of the devil's chaplain. What good Creator would contrive such a world, an arena on which, like gladiators, individuals and whole species struggle for survival? If he watches all that like some Roman emperor sitting in his special box, I will not pay him tribute. Happy are those who, like Emma, preserved the image of God as our Father and friend.

Transmission of Acquired Traits

It is not customary to write about the psychological problems of clergymen, as they seem to be a separate species, the servants of the ritual. Also that priest, let us call him Stanislaw, was of the opinion that he had no right to talk about himself, as people expected from him something else. Nevertheless, he was well aware that he simultaneously lived in two zones, one protected by silence, another which used, exclusively, words and notions authorized by the Catholic dogmatics.

What he carried inside could be briefly defined as dread. He even used to think that his parents transmitted to him, born after the war, their moments of terror encoded in blood, which would mean that we inherit not only a combination of genes but also all the tremors of organism, induced by joy and despair. A country with an exceptionally cruel history exposed everybody to dramatic situations, and the memory of atrocious events smoldered under the surface of everyday routine. Stanislaw considered that his dread of the world was the real cause of his decision to become a priest. He meditated much on the generation of his parents, coming to the conclusion that it was crippled or even sick, and, what was

worse, unwilling to realize it. If one is a slave, humiliated, slapped on the face, filled with hate but impotent, the experience marks him forever. Slave raids in Africa and the institution of slavery were recreated on the European continent, except that they were directed against white men, those slaves being forced, in addition, to watch when their neighbors, also white, were killed, while it was forbidden to intervene under penalty of death. Stanislaw did not know and did not try to learn what his parents felt when they had to turn their eyes away from the spectacle of the annihilation of the Jews and to confess in their hearts that their desire to protect themselves was stronger than compassion or decency. Every Sunday they would go to church and somehow succeeded in patching up contradiction. Perhaps they begged the Good Lord for forgiveness.

Father Stanislaw thought of himself as a son of people humiliated and crushed by a police State established in the name of a utopia, first of race, then of class. In the seminary, his curiosity was attracted by the history of the first centuries of the Church, when Christianity most obviously was a religion of slaves. Those who at the slightest sign of rebellion were nailed on the crosses standing along the roads, so that their death throes testified to the invincible power of the empire.

Father Stanislaw's dread filled him with images of suffering no human protest or begging could avert. Heaven answered with silence the moans of lashed serfs, the screams of crucified slaves, and the prayers of prisoners in the twentieth-century death camps. If it was God who created this world submitted to the blind law of force, then He was a moral monster and it was impossible to believe in Him.

Stanislaw put his trust in God only because God delivered to torture his only Son, in other words, Himself, and whispered in death agony with His human lips the words of utter despair. A complete lack of logic in the Christian religion was the only possible logic of faith. And yet Stanislaw did not divulge to anybody his, strange for a priest, obsession. Namely, he was unable to accept the use made of the cross. The faithful would carry around in their churches an instrument of torture as a sign of Salvation, without seeing on it a body contorted in unbearable pain, as if one could be a Christian only by renouncing empathic imagination. By changing the crucifix into abstraction, they also stripped of reality the body on the gallows or in the gas chamber, just so that they did not have to recognize that a religion of a crucified God is a religion of cosmic pain.

Translated from the Polish by the author and Robert Hass

H. J. KAPLAN

How France Mourned Mitterrand (Excerpts from 1996 Journal)

January 9, 1996

This morning, I sat down to write a letter – and that is as far as I got. What stopped me in my tracks was the radio I had left playing – an execrable habit – in the bedroom adjoining my study. The music stopped and there was a bulletin to the effect that François Mitterrand was dead.

January 15-20, 1996

Mitterrand spent his entire life as a politician, and although he was capable of behavior deemed scandalous or worse by his adversaries and even at times by his own followers, he seems to have lived and died with a clear conscience, sincerely believing that whatever served his political fortunes must *ipso facto* redound to the higher interests of his country. And hence of all mankind. He was President of France for fourteen years, longer than anyone since the inception of the Fifth Republic, which he had first denounced as a “permanent coup d’état” and then made the instrument of what he called his *force tranquille*. A virtuoso performance. It was often said of him (first by the novelist François Mauriac, I think) that he was the hero of a novel, whereas his arch-adversary, Charles de Gaulle, was the hero of an epic poem. A novel which he might have written, since he fancied himself a writer and actually published a few books – political essays, not fiction, to be sure, although he liked to suggest that in devoting himself to the commonweal he was sacrificing the literary artist he might have become. . . . A couple of years ago, his party was swept from office. The country was fed up with the financial scandals he had tolerated and even abetted, demoralized by economic and social problems and prepared to welcome a brave new dispensation – which, unfortunately, never came. The erstwhile Opposition, now in power, has still not managed to turn things around; in fact, for reasons I don’t propose to go into now, the situation seems to be worsening, with more recession, more unemployment, more confusion in foreign affairs, where the French see their government helpless in Algeria, humiliated in Bosnia and (how sharper than a serpent’s tooth!) blackguarded by *la conscience universelle* for nuclear testing in the Pacific. The irony is that *la conscience universelle* is a French speciality, if not

a French invention, like champagne and perfumes. In short, nothing but political and moral frustration; and no longer even the prospect of turning things around. With the result that a couple of months ago, the new incumbents having – with what appeared to be an arrogant disregard for the promises they had made during the electoral campaign – raised taxes and proposed to reduce the deficit of certain state enterprises by trimming entitlements, the entire country went into a sort of temper tantrum, with strikes paralyzing public services, no mail, no rail, subway or bus travel, huge demonstrations, for weeks on end. It was over by Christmas, all passion spent, and billions lost and nothing much to show for it all, except perhaps further to chasten the so-called political class and leave the country deeper in debt, with more bankruptcies, more unemployment and even less confidence in French institutions – private and public – than during the dismal years of Socialist rule.

Now from all this one might expect that the Last Days are at hand, but my own feeling is that things are likely to get better, if only because it is difficult to see how they could get worse. There's a great deal of ruin in a country, as Adam Smith once said, and there are times when governments are simply bound to do things wrong until – exhausted, desperate and having run out of wrong things to do – they are obliged to do a few things right. To be sure, the French have never been high on Adam Smith – and in situations like this they are more likely to quote Paul Valéry, to the effect that civilizations no longer believe that they last forever. . . . But again, I don't propose to get into all that now. Suffice it to say that, having heard the bulletin about the President, I left my desk, turned the radio off and the television on, and spent the next hour watching the comings and goings around the handsome apartment building on the very posh rue Frédéric Le Play, near the École Militaire, where François Mitterand – attended by a physician specialized in pain control and a few intimates, had elected to cease taking nourishment and die.

The hour stretched into a week, and quite a week it was. I am old enough to remember the passing of many great national leaders, Roosevelt, to begin with, and Stalin, Kennedy, Churchill, de Gaulle. This time, with a series of spectacular events and pseudo-events organized and choreographed by the government in accordance with Mitterrand's instructions and under the direction of the testamentary executor he had chosen for this purpose, the billionaire head of a great media empire, the entire country was riveted day after day, indeed hour after hour, by the removal of the mortal remains to the little town of Jarnac, the President's birthplace, and the "private" ceremonies there, by the high mass at Notre Dame de Paris in the presence of scores of heads of state, and by the processions and demonstrations at the Bastille and the Pantheon and in other

emblematic places to which Mitterrand had the habit of journeying each year. There were also vignettes of his cronies and courtiers, some of whom – including the prime minister, Bérégovoy, a suicide – had died under scandalous circumstances; of his wife Danielle and his former mistress, a state museum employee, and their daughter, Mazarine, whose existence had been revealed in recent years as part of his professed desire to make his life an Open Book. And for public affairs addicts like myself (my old professional deformation returning) all this was interspersed with endless recapitulations of his long march to power through more than fifty years of French history in the course of which he had boxed the political compass, from Far Right to Far Left and back to the middle, and finally (in the last two years of his reign) withdrawn from politics and government for all practical purposes, and devoted himself to dying, as it were, in public – regretful but resigned, disclosing in small increments (artfully, like a writer, although the story sometimes escaped him) the shadowy side of his private life and his past, as if he already belonged to the ages; his face increasingly diaphanous and handsome, almost transparent at the end, which he awaited with something like the wry and skeptical stoicism of his fellow-southwesterner, Michel de Montaigne.

In his career and in his culture, François Mitterrand was – at once literally and in the Emersonian sense – a Representative Man; and this, presumably, was what the French wanted at the moment, so that the media and the government (with nay-sayers embarrassed temporarily into silence by the *de mortibus* taboo) made of his Death and Transfiguration a spectacle unlike anything I have ever seen in this country – and I've spent quite a lot of my life here, remember, since World War II.

January 26, 1996

Mitterrand, still, on my mind.

The public to-do is abating, although there is a flap over an instant book published by one Dr. Gubler, formerly his physician, who claims that the nature and inevitable end of the President's illness was known as early as 1981, and kept from the public in deliberate contradiction to the declared policy of total openness on this subject – a matter of concern for the French ever since they found out that another recent president, Pompidou, spent his last months in a terminal coma without anyone outside his wife and inner circle knowing about it. Was it Mme. Pompidou, at that time, who had her finger on the nuclear trigger? . . . *Mystère*.

The Gubler book is not available, except on the Internet, the first print-run having been sold out on the first day and any further printing banned by court-order, on the grounds that the book is in violation of the *secret professionnel*, i.e. the confidentiality to which a doctor's patient is sup-

posed to be entitled. The publisher, of course, is suing to have the court-order lifted, and this may eventually lead to a change in French jurisprudence in this field. The bill of rights is still part of the French constitution, but there is nothing quite like our First Amendment, and plenty of precedent for what we call “prior restraint” e.g. in repressing racist, pornographic, or simply scurrilous speech. Yet one rarely, if ever, hears anyone in France protesting that their society is shackled and unfree for having set such limits to speech – limits which must, in the view of absolutists like my old friend Dan Schor in Washington, have a “chilling effect” on the discussion of public issues.

Mitterrand’s adversaries paid dubious tribute to his tactical cunning by calling him *le Florentin*, or *Macchiavelli*, especially after he jettisoned the Socialist ideology which had brought him to such heights – and the economy to such depths that the Opposition regained a narrow majority in the National Assembly, halfway through his first term. Instead of dissolving the Assembly or leaving the Presidency, as de Gaulle would surely have done, he appointed a Gaullist, the impetuous Jacques Chirac, prime minister, and allowed him to share responsibility for the growing domestic mess – a mug’s game for the leader of the Opposition, but implicit (Chirac maintained) in the Constitution of the Fifth Republic – while he, *la force tranquille*, was seen to be preoccupied with foreign affairs. Fatally stricken with cancer, but by no means incapacitated at this stage, Mitterrand now subtly positioned himself for his final role: – no longer *Dieu* or God, as when he had a majority in the Assembly – but rather as Tonton, the country’s kindly old Uncle. Still the leader of the Left, because the country was “sociologically” on the Left, as he put it – but essentially above the partisan bickering to which his unruly people, including the Socialists, were so deplorably prone. This is the Mitterrand who was triumphantly elected to a second term and provided, once again, with a majority in the National Assembly.

To what end, an outside observer may ask? There was no longer much talk of changing society, and none of “changing life” – an echo from an earlier time which now faded away as the voice of the *Enarques*, so-called, experts, administrators, political scientists, was heard in the land. In any event, it was now firmly established that “alternation” could and would happen in the Fifth Republic, and that the parties could and would seek power without putting the regime itself in question. France was a welfare state with a mixed economy; which the Socialists would manage in a more people-friendly fashion, this time (and if you can believe this you can believe anything) without degrading the currency or provoking capital flight and recession. But Mitterrand made it clear as he began his second term that he proposed to leave the mechanics to the *Enarques* and devote

himself to the Big Picture, meaning the Franco-German Alliance, European unity, and a series of architectural projects – such as the huge new National Library in Paris – which would be his proudest legacy, he said, since French law and tradition put few restraints on the monarchical power of the Pontifex Maximus to decide, e.g. whether to build Mr. Pei's *pyramide* in the courtyard of the Louvre, or how to close the great perspective to the west of the Champs Elysées.

In foreign affairs, his policy hardly departed, at first, except in style, from the course set by de Gaulle under quite different circumstances, i.e., when the seemingly solid Soviet Empire extended into central Europe. Indeed, his finest hour prior to the dramatic events of 1989 was a distinctly Gaullian speech to the Bundestag urging that the Germans stand firm during the so-called missile crisis. Later, when the Evil Empire was collapsing, he reacted rather grudgingly and ineptly, vexing the Germans by appearing to regret the withdrawal of the Russians from Berlin and the sudden disappearance of the DDR, then committing the opposite error: excessive haste in encouraging the breakup of Yugoslavia. He seemed to resign himself too readily to the attempted coup against Gorbachev, so that when the coup failed, French policy once again looked confused and inept. The truth was that the French had a quandary, not a policy, because all these events signalled a telluric movement, a shift in the European balance of power in favor of the Federal Republic, and no one was ready for it, least of all the Germans, who seemed to have kicked the habit of seeking to dominate their neighbors – but who knew how long that would last? The question arose inevitably, especially to people of Mitterrand's generation, and the conventional answer was European integration.

This was not a belief in federalism or any other ideology or system of government. It was the idea, developed and cherished by centrist politicians during the Fourth Republic, a period during which Mitterrand served in a dozen ministerial posts, that the French could make up for their relative economic weakness by their superiority in mental dexterity and rhetoric, i.e., by exerting political leadership in the Commission of the E.C., based in Brussels, the parliament in Strasbourg, and other European institutions through which the Germans (having exorcized their old demons) would be bound irrevocably to the West.

Not a bad bet, considering the alternatives. A hope, at least, for the European future, although the prospects for it seemed more plausible when the Federal Republic was only a rump of the old Reich and Russian tanks were stationed about fifteen miles from Hamburg. . . . Mitterrand, in any event, spent what remained of his political credit and his physical strength presiding over the negotiation of the Maastricht Treaty and persuading the French people to ratify it. In this effort he had the support of

the erstwhile Opposition, which had again won a majority in the National Assembly, although the debate on Maastricht revealed deep divisions among the Gaullists, and it now appears highly doubtful that the Maastricht program – from which the British had already distanced themselves – will actually retain majority support in France and achieve its declared purpose: a Europe irreversibly integrated, with a single currency and effective coordination of national policies in social matters, defense and foreign affairs. The new post-Maastricht community, faced with its first serious test, a Europe-wide recession with very high levels of unemployment, seems increasingly unwieldy and irrelevant to the French, whose heads are elsewhere, at the moment, as my wife puts it – meaning jobs, the social situation, Bosnia, Algeria, the schools, etc. Of course she voted against ratification, and feels that the entire contraption will be put aside as her compatriots come to realize that it condemns their economy to eternal dependence on the deflationist policies of the German central bank, which means a strong currency, to be sure, but little or no growth, as far ahead as the eye can see. Meanwhile the social fabric rots, with over three million unemployed and the social security system verging on bankruptcy. In consequence, the idea of a European union built around a Franco-German core is losing its appeal in this country and, for similar reasons, elsewhere in Western Europe as well.

January 31, 1996

In the realm of internal French politics, however, Mitterrand's heritage would appear to be more secure: a realignment of political forces which seems likely to endure at least into the new century – with the Communists disappearing into the proverbial dustbin of history and the Far Right beefed up (with the help of a clever change in the voting system) in order to split the conservatives and prepare the ground for a return of Social Democracy to power. To be sure, François Mitterrand was not single-handedly responsible for the eclipse of the Communists and the rise of M. Le Pen's National Front. His role was to perceive and make use of these developments, first to consolidate his own power and then to improve the future prospects of the Left – and if this also meant improving the prospects of M. Le Pen, *tant pis!* Or rather – since the National Front would at once serve as a scarecrow and drain votes away from the respectable Right – *tant mieux!*

February 6, 1996

So the fever has run its course. *The tumult and the shouting dies – The captains and the kings depart* – and it occurs to me to wonder what it is about this spectacle that has so transfixed me – at a time when, according

to my wife, the bathroom window won't close and the carpet in the front hall is a danger to life and limb. Not even to *mention* my deathless prose. Marcelle cannot forgive herself for having voted for Mitterrand, not once but twice; and cannot believe that the country can feel anything but relief at seeing the last of him. As for my own fascination with all this, there's an element of voyeurism in it, pure and simple. Like other visitors we've had this week – with the notable exception of her old friend Evelyn Baylet, President of the regional daily, *La Dépêche*, whom I saw on television, confessing (with an inimitable little smile) that she found the man attractive, *et pourquoi ne pas le dire?* – Marcelle insists that all the to-do about Mitterrand has been cooked up by the media and corresponds to nothing real. It's just the so-called political class, doing its thing. And the literary intellectuals, contemplating their navels, as usual, at so much per word, the scoundrels. *Pauvre France!*

Well, maybe so. The world, meanwhile, was otherwise engaged – with fragile cease-fires in Bosnia and Ulster, and the Beijing regime making threatening moves in the straits of Taiwan, not to forget Algeria, the economy, the incredible growth of new communications systems, and (but what an afterthought) a fateful presidential campaign beginning in the United States. Agreed. It may well be that what happens over here these days will be little noted nor long remembered. But the fact remains that this is not just *pauvre* France but France period and if you can't see that the import of this country is greater than its importance, i.e., than the sum of its parts, then forget it, forget my famous (and probably posthumous) memoir, and leave me to my dotage.

February 18, 1996

Thinking, still, about The Death and Transfiguration of François Mitterrand, I have to conclude that this business has not been a figment of my overwrought imagination, *pace* Marcelle and her godchildren. It was real, it was earnest, and although it seems now to have gone with the wind and people are going about their lives as if nothing had happened, it will remain engraved in the history of this country as . . . what? As what the hip journalists call a defining event, albeit a minor one – meaning a collective experience, one that turns people from their private affairs, however briefly, and rivets them on the *res publica* – like the Battle of Britain, say, or Stalingrad, or the assassination of John F. Kennedy, although these will be of incomparably greater consequence, no doubt. It is possible to generalize about such events wherever they occur; indeed, I have just done so. But there is also, it seems to me, a peculiarly French way of dramatizing the national experience – one that is hard to describe, yet unmistakable. It is a rich peculiarity, embedded in French history and culture, and it can't be

simply dismissed or explained away with references to the media or the intellectuals or the political class or whatever. It is like the “why” questions in biology, which cannot be answered, only begged, by reference to God or Natural Selection – since on the one hand, God keeps His counsel; and, on the other, the Darwinian principle, insightful as it is, cannot explain why certain phenomena combine to produce certain forms when other combinations might (for the purposes of survival) have produced the same or better results. We can say only that this is the way things actually happened, e.g., this is how creatures – and peoples – become what they are.

Needless to say, I am uncomfortable with this analogy – between societies and living organisms – and propose to say no more about it until I have gone back to school and passed Biology I. And a few courses in History, as well. Next year, perhaps, when Marcelle is back in shape and things have settled down here, chores done, etc. Meanwhile, it occurs to me that this business of burying Mitterrand after watching him die in public amounts to what Raymond Aron called a psychodrama, presumably in distinction to events which occur in the real world, not merely in people’s heads. A dubious distinction. However that may be, this was the term Aron used to dismiss the events of May 1968, when the students at the University of Paris, whose numbers had increased exponentially since the advent of de Gaulle a decade earlier, suddenly began demonstrating in protest against the inadequacies of their schools and the poverty of their prospects, and then built barricades in the time-honored way, amid clouds of tear gas. Under the leadership of Maoist and Trotskyist elements, they occupied public buildings in the Latin Quarter, resolutely proclaimed their hostility to the so-called consumer society and all its works, and launched what looked for a couple of weeks like the dress-rehearsal for a revolution, with the government playing nothing but a bit part at first, hardly even a walk-on – both de Gaulle and his prime minister, Pompidou, being out of the country during the first act. Pompidou came back first, moving carefully to contact the union leaders and rein in the police, who were in danger of losing their cool, and reopened the Sorbonne, which the students promptly occupied. And then de Gaulle, looking quite unlike himself: out of touch, uncertain, and (one suddenly saw it, alas) *old*. He was pushing eighty, and one remembered his remark about Pétain, his protector and patron in the late Twenties: “Old age is a shipwreck.” By mid-May the trade unions, although led by Communists, Socialists, and other archaic types – bureaucrats who had never so much as heard of, say, Herbert Marcuse, and had nothing but antipathy for the *gauchiste* students – had got into the act and unleashed an effective series of strikes, idling some ten million workers, for higher wages. Soon people in certain ministries, as I discovered when I visited one of them, were burning personal

papers and preparing to lock their doors, presumably until someone took over. A handful of anti-Gaullist political figures – Mitterrand and Mendès-France prominent among them – announced that they would be available to form something like a Committee of Public Safety and engineer a transition to . . . what? Nobody knew, least of all the students, who were still happily tearing up cobblestones and staging parades but unable to agree on anything much else. Except, as proclaimed in the graffiti one saw on the walls of the Odéon, the Sorbonne, and just about everywhere on the Left Bank, e.g., DOWN WITH EXAMS, and LET IMAGINATION TAKE POWER, and IT IS FORBIDDEN TO FORBID. At this point de Gaulle disappeared for a few days – by helicopter to General Massu's HQ in Germany, it turned out later, as if Massu could help in the event of an actual insurrection in Paris. Then he returned and, on May 30th, made a Gaullian speech on television, at last, and dissolved the National Assembly. Previously he had suggested a referendum on "participation," a vaguely corporatist social policy, long ago inscribed in the Gaullist program. This idea had gone over like a lead balloon; the opponents of the Fifth Republic rejected it on the grounds that a referendum would be plebiscitary and undemocratic; and, worse, the public largely ignored it. But no one could object to the impeccably Republican idea of electing a new legislature. This was the signal the country was waiting for – a new deal, yes, but no more disorder. May '68 was coming to an end.

Although the students began their movement in April and a few of the strikes lasted well into June, the shorthand reference became "May '68." As we say "the Sixties." It was first, simply, "the events" in the hour-by-hour media coverage of the colorful street scenes, but then, in the instant books which hastened to instruct us on what had really happened and what it all meant and in a whole literature which appeared thereafter, it was and remains May '68 – a psychodrama, perhaps, during which nothing really happened, except in people's heads.

Of course what happened in people's heads was not without importance; only deplorable, terminally confused. But I don't propose to get into all that now. Suffice it to say that the old French reputation for lucidity and clarity, already compromised by Sartre & Co. in the days of PARIS FRANCE, was just about laid to rest by May '68. It had a peculiarly dreamlike quality, maybe this was what Aron meant; and it elicited a riot of interpretation by the phenomenologists, structuralists, Lacanian psychoanalysts *et al.*, who wrote all those books. None of them, instant or otherwise, and I must have bought a few, seems to have survived in our library, which we've been unpacking down here in sunny Toulouse. Except one, of course – the remarkable prose poem my daughter Leslie published ten years later, *L'Excès-L'Usine*, about her experience as a facto-

ry worker, when she left the École Normale Supérieure and attempted to “join the people,” like the Narodniks in pre-Bolshevik Russia, together with other talented young dreamers – who would soon awaken to a huge hangover, alas.

May '68 ended, in fact, as abruptly as it had started – with a public demonstration – not of students, this one, skirmishing with the riot police, but of the hitherto silent majority, hundreds of thousands of Parisians who assembled their columns and banners on the Place de la Concorde, behind André Malraux and a handful of other stalwarts, and marched up the Champs Élysées to the Arc de Triomphe – presumably to deposit a wreath on the tomb of the Unknown Soldier and to declare that the crisis was over. *Finita la commedia*. Malraux made one of his shaman-like speeches. De Gaulle was back in command, and the country was back, or going back, to work. The effect of the elections – whether or not they enhanced the Gaullist majority, as they in fact enormously did – would be further to legitimize the constitution adopted in 1962; and in the fullness of time an Education Ministry headed by the prestigious Edgar Faure would address the problems of the University. . . . What few of us realized at first, however, was that the aging General took little, if any, satisfaction in what he might – earlier in his life – have seen as a triumph and a vindication. His “certain idea of France” was looking a bit ragged along the edges. He knew that he owed the survival of his regime, in part at least, to Pompidou’s success in containing the riots in the Latin Quarter without killing anyone, and buttering up the trade unions without ruining the economy; and partly to the fact that the Russians, as Massu had apparently been told by his colleague, the Soviet commander in Germany, had instructed their French agents to veto the Mitterrand-Mendès-France initiative, because Pierre Mendès-France had compromised himself with the anti-Communist Left. So the French learned again what they had forgotten since the Stalin-Hitler pact – that living with Fascists might be all in a day’s work for the Moscow bureaucrats, but they would brook no rivals on the Left. The whole affair was demeaning, *la chien-lit*, as de Gaulle called it, a picturesque and very Gaullian word for a “screw-up.” He was terminally tired, fed up, preparing to call it a day.

STEPHEN MILLER

The Future of Disinterest and Foucault's Regime of Truth

Disinterest or disinterestedness has fallen upon hard times. For one thing, "disinterested" is often used to denote "uninterestedness" or "indifference." According to the author of *Modern American Usage*, who argues that there is no good synonym for the word, this is to be regretted, since disinterest "is still the name of a great, sterling, and positive virtue – freedom from self-seeking motives." Secondly, in recent years the very idea of disinterestedness has been called into question by a number of post-Nietzschean writers who are infected with what Ernest Gellner has called "epistemological hypochondria," since they put quotation marks around objectivity and rationality as well as truth. These writers, who sometimes call themselves postmodernists, argue that disinterestedness in the sense of being unbiased is impossible because everyone is a prisoner of what the French theorist Michel Foucault called a "regime of truth" – a way of looking at things that is determined by the prevailing norms of a particular society.

The word "disinterest" has had a peculiar history. In the sixteenth century, disinterested did mean uninterested. The more recent meaning did not become commonplace until the end of the seventeenth century, when a number of moralists and political theorists pondered the relationship of disinterest to self-interest. The French moralist La Rochefoucauld argued that disinterested conduct was possible, but that no one could know whether his own actions were disinterested or not. "Self-interest," he says, "speaks all sorts of languages and plays all sorts of roles, even that of disinterestedness." La Rochefoucauld is implying that we should not rush to judgment about the motives of others, since we do not even know what our own motives are.

When La Rochefoucauld speaks about self-interest, he is not necessarily thinking of an interest in financial gain. One could have an interest in gaining fame – making a name for oneself in the world – rather than in making money. By the eighteenth century, self-interest (sometimes called interest or private interest) came to be understood primarily in economic terms, so that Samuel Johnson defines disinterested as being "superior to regard of private advantage: not influenced by private profit." Johnson

thought self-interest in the sense of a desire to make money was a positive social and political force. He was in favor of what the eighteenth century called “luxury” – economic progress. So too were Hume and Adam Smith. Hume welcomed the rise of what he called “parties from interest” because he thought that the pursuit of one’s self-interest was a moderate passion. Parties from interest, he said, were willing to compromise, unlike “parties from principle.” The latter were dangerous to the health of the polity, since people driven by principle – Hume was thinking especially of those who belonged to dissenting religious sects – often provoked violent civil discord.

Some writers, most notably Bolingbroke in England and Rousseau in France, decried private interest as a dangerous political force. “Nothing is more dangerous,” Rousseau says in *The Social Contract*, “than the influence of private interests on public affairs. . . .” According to Rousseau, “when private interests make themselves felt and smaller associations begin to influence the whole society, then the common interest becomes distorted and encounters opposition, voting is no longer unanimous, [and] the general will is no longer the will of all. . . .”

The American founders, especially James Madison and Alexander Hamilton, the authors of *The Federalist Papers*, were swayed by the arguments of Hume and Smith – not of Rousseau. Hamilton and Madison did not disavow the notion of disinterestedness, but they were wary of those who made much of their disinterestedness. Hamilton thought it was unreasonable to expect most citizens to be disinterested. “We may preach till we are tired of the theme, the necessity of disinterestedness in republics, without making a single proselyte.” Hamilton and Madison argued for a modified notion of disinterestedness in which political leaders realize that it is wise to refrain from speculating about the motives of those with whom they disagree and also recognize that in a commercial society there inevitably will be a variety of different interests. This modified notion of disinterestedness, which gained ground in England and the United States, was attacked by some writers who lamented the fact that men of commerce – men animated by self-interest rather than disinterest – were now playing an important role in politics.

Marx took a totally different view of the question of disinterestedness. He did not complain that self-interested men were too powerful; he questioned the ability of any bourgeois politician to be disinterested. All legislators, reform or otherwise, serve the interests of the ruling class – the bourgeoisie. In *The Civil War in France*, Marx describes elections as an event in which “once in three or six years” the citizens decide “which member of the ruling class was to misrepresent the people in Parliament. . . .” No matter how enlightened the governing class is, this class is driven by its

class interests. "Even the *most favorable situation* for the working class . . . however much it may improve the material existence of the worker, does not remove the antagonism between his interests and the interests of the bourgeoisie. . . ." After the triumph of Communism, disinterestedness is beside the point; under Communism everyone inevitably is disinterested because there is no longer any cleavage "between the particular and the common interest. . . ."

For Marx, the key factor is not one's disinterestedness but one's consciousness of the laws of economic development. "The reform of consciousness," Marx says, "means nothing else than . . . that we wake the world up from the dream it is dreaming about itself, that we explain to the world the nature of its own actions." This awakening, Marx argues, would come about "not through dogma, but through an analysis of mystic consciousness which is unclear to itself, be it religious or political." Marx divided political reformers into two categories: those who are awake, that is, who know the laws of economic development, and those who are asleep. He says of the Italian patriot Giuseppe Mazzini: "The fact is that Mazzini never understood anything with his old-fashioned republicanism." Mazzini's understanding was at fault, not his motives. According to Marx, men like Mazzini are dreamers living in a world of illusion. Their disinterestedness is irrelevant, since their false consciousness makes them serve the class interests of the bourgeoisie.

Nietzsche's attack on disinterest was different from Marx's and in many respects more radical. It has also been more influential in the last twenty years. Nietzsche does not say disinterest is irrelevant; he says it is a decadent modern ideal. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, he attacks "the modern popularity of praise of the 'disinterested'," and in *Twilight of the Idols*, he says that "a morality in which self-interest wilts away remains a bad sign under all circumstances. . . . The best is lacking when self-interest begins to be lacking." According to Nietzsche, "strong ages, noble cultures, consider pity, 'neighbor-love,' and the lack of self and self-assurance something contemptible. Ages must be measured by their positive strength. . . ." An age that praises disinterest, Nietzsche suggests, is a decadent age.

Nietzsche generally regards disinterest as a weak form of self-interest: "the naked truth, which is surely not hard to come by, [is] that the 'disinterested' action is an exceedingly interesting and interested action. . . ." Although all actions are "interested," motivated by self-interest, there are different kinds of self-interest: noble self-interest and contemptible "modern" self-interest. "Self-interest is worth as much as the person who has it: it can be worth a great deal and it can be unworthy and contemptible." The contemptible kind of self-interest, Nietzsche suggests, is the self-interest of those engaged in commerce. According to Nietzsche, the noble

soul (also known as “overman” or free spirit or free man) despises financial considerations of any kind. “Not to understand trade is noble,” Nietzsche says in *The Dawn of Day*. This lower form of self-interest, Nietzsche says, is widespread in the modern age. “Our moderns,” he says, “with our virtues of work, modesty, legality, and scientism – accumulating, economic, machinelike – appear as a *weak* age.”

England, Nietzsche says, is the chief “modern” nation. He speaks disparagingly of many English writers, and he despises what he calls English morality – a morality, he says, that equates virtue with “the striving for *English* happiness. . . .” Nietzsche dismisses the idea that the English are a free people. How can the English be free, he asks, when they practice the morality of slaves? “The human being,” he says, “who has become free . . . spits on the contemptible type of well-being dreamed of by shopkeepers, Christians, cows, females, Englishmen, and other democrats.”

Though Nietzsche, like Marx, continually attacks bourgeois society and complains that the wrong men “have so far held sway over the fate of Europe,” he would undoubtedly recoil at the idea of a political program for putting noble souls in power. “The free man,” he says, “is a *warrior*,” but he means by warrior a state of mind rather than a way of life. Noble souls, he implies, have nothing to do with politics. These free spirits are “born, sworn, jealous friends of *solitude*. . . .” Moreover, noble souls are not easily identifiable, for individuals may be mixtures of nobility and baseness; master morality and slave morality “at times . . . occur directly alongside each other – even in the same human being, within a single soul.”

Being a noble soul is less a question of having or acquiring certain traits than possessing a sense of the self that borders on the mystical. Nietzsche says the noble soul is known neither by his actions – “actions are prone to many interpretations, always unfathomable” – nor his “works”: “It is not the works, it is the *faith* that is decisive here . . . some fundamental certainty that anoble soul has about itself, something that cannot be sought, nor found, nor perhaps lost.” Walter Kaufmann regrets that Nietzsche “is easily misunderstood,” yet Nietzsche invites misunderstanding because his key ideas are obscure – especially the idea of the noble soul.

What Nietzsche celebrates is fuzzy, but what he condemns is clear: his work is a diatribe against bourgeois man. Such a view of bourgeois man is commonplace in nineteenth-century literature; the pharmacist Monsieur Homais in *Madame Bovary* is an example. But Nietzsche’s view is more radical than Flaubert’s. Not only does he attack bourgeois self-interest, he also devalues the fundamental ideals of Western culture, that of disinterested thought. According to him, the idea of a disinterested quest for the truth is humbug. Those philosophers who say they are searching

for objective truth – a word Nietzsche usually puts in quotation marks – are guilty of Tartuffery, for they are really only enunciating their own “truth.” “Gradually it has become clear to me what every great philosophy so far has been: namely the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir. . . .”

Nietzsche suggests that the philosophers of the future will be different from those of the past in that they will not say that they are seeking the truth. They will say, as Nietzsche himself says: “My judgment is *my* judgment: no one else is easily entitled to it. . . .” What the philosophers of the future say will be “their truth”; it will not be a “truth for everyman.” Those who want their truth to be a truth for everyman, Nietzsche says, are guilty of “dogmatic aspirations.” Being dogmatic generally means saying that something is true in the face of evidence to the contrary, or asserting something *a priori*, but Nietzsche contends that anyone who even thinks he is disinterestedly trying to persuade others of what he considers to be the truth is guilty of being dogmatic.

If there are only the personal “truths” of free spirits, what about objective knowledge? Nietzsche speaks of “the objective person . . . the ideal scholar in whom the scientific instinct . . . for once blossoms and blooms. . . .” Yet this “objective man,” though in some respects admirable, is “for the most part a man without substance and content, a ‘selfless’ man.” He is a slave, “albeit the most sublime type of slave. . . .” Such disinterested scholars lack the negative traits of those driven by bourgeois self-interest, but they also lack the positive traits of noble souls; the latter do not proffer objective knowledge but “great things,” – i.e. personal “truths” that can be grasped only by other noble souls.

Nietzsche’s noble soul lives in a world elsewhere, a world beyond politics, a world of depth and solitude that he celebrates in this obscure passage: “In the end it must be as it is and always has been: great things remain for the great, abysses for the profound, nuances and shudders for the refined, and, in brief, all that is rare for the rare.” Yet at the same time he suggests that bourgeois society has been very tough on the noble soul. Liberal institutions, he says, “undermine the will to power . . . make men small, cowardly, and hedonistic. . . .” He despises bourgeois society, yet he is contemptuous of political reformers. His politics are the politics of a profoundly unpolitical man.

What might be called Nietzsche’s unpolitical politics has strongly influenced a number of postmodern thinkers, especially Michel Foucault, who has been called “the most revolutionary – and deeply serious – of postwar Nietzscheans.” Foucault often proclaimed his debt to Nietzsche. In “Nietzsche, Genealogy and History,” Foucault discusses how important Nietzsche’s notion of genealogy is for his own work. For Foucault, geneal-

ogy is a method of putting truth in an historical context. "Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true. . . ." Arguing that "truth isn't outside power," he calls into question the "apparently disinterested attention" and "the 'pure' devotion to objectivity" of the scholar. Disinterestedness is impossible, he implies, because the scholar is inevitably a prisoner of a certain "regime of truth."

Foucault's notion of genealogy, unlike Nietzsche's, has a strongly political coloration. Nietzsche celebrates noble souls and their "truths," but these truths can be grasped only by other noble souls, who always have been and will be few in number. By contrast, Foucault often speaks of the need for radical political change, for creating a new man, and he exhorts the political intellectual to struggle against "that regime of truth which is so essential to the structure and functioning of our society."

Foucault's political project is not very clear. At times he implies that "truth" will always be in quotation marks, since even if a transformation takes place, truth will still be a function of power. In support of this view, he says that "humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination." Yet for the most part his view of history is strongly linear: the present age suffers from the dominance of "modern power structures," yet a political revolution is possible, one that will put an end to this "regime of truth." The political intellectual, Foucault says, has a mission: to "detach the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates at the present time."

Like Nietzsche, Foucault strongly attacks the modern age, but for a different reason: whereas Nietzsche finds "modern ideas" contemptible, Foucault finds them frightening – contending that they have been used to justify a vast expansion of the state's power. He speaks of "new technologies of power introduced since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries" that have been employed to control men's lives. According to him, both rationalization and bureaucratization have led to "excesses of political power." Ignoring the differences between totalitarian regimes and bourgeois liberal regimes, he speaks of genocide as being "the dream of modern powers." He sees modern state power spreading its wings everywhere, affecting all aspects of modern life – hospitals, schools, and especially the criminal justice system. "It seems to me," Foucault says, "that the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them."

Foucault's blueprint for combatting the spread of despotic state power is not clear. Despite his repudiation of Marxism, his politics seems conventionally leftist, for he speaks of struggling with the proletariat against "the multinational corporations, the judicial and police apparatuses, the property speculators, etc." Moreover, it is difficult to take Foucault's revolutionary aspirations seriously, for he was a member of the French establishment, holding a chair at the College de France, one of the country's most prestigious institutions.

Whatever we make of Foucault's radical politics, it is clear that he often seemed uncomfortable with the idea of objectivity. In 1982, in what seems an effort to give a Nietzschean coloring to his radical politics, he said, "What I say does not have objective value. . . . Each of my works is a part of my own biography." But it is one thing to offer "my truths," as Nietzsche did, to other noble souls; it is another to make them the basis for political action. Despite his reservations about the objective value of his own critique of the modern era, Foucault thought political theory and political action went hand-in-hand. "I have always been concerned with linking together as tightly as possible the historical and theoretical analysis of power relations, institutions, and knowledge, to the movements, critiques, and experiences that call them into question in reality."

In the late 1960s Foucault, who had been a Communist Party member in the early 1950s and a strong anti-Communist in the 1960s, linked up with one such movement: an ultra-left Maoist group called the Gauche Proletarienne (GP), which had been founded in the aftermath of the 1968 student revolt. Foucault, his biographer says, "became an oracle of the ultra-left" who in his capacity as head of the philosophy department at Vincennes hired ultra-leftists. Defending his choice of professors after the department was decertified by the Ministry of Education, Foucault said: "We must free ourselves from . . . cultural conservatism, as well as from political conservatism. We must see our rituals for what they are: completely arbitrary things, tied to our bourgeois way of life. . . ."

The notion of "freeing oneself" not only required unmasking the "regime of truth"; it also required participating in an action that in itself betokened freedom, insofar as it was what Foucault called a "limit-experience," an experience that bourgeois society condemned. He remarked in 1971, "It is possible that the rough outline of future society is supplied by the recent experiences with drugs, sex, communes, other forms of consciousness, and other forms of individuality." Foucault became increasingly preoccupied with these "forms of individuality," implying that a limit-experience might be the basic building block of a new society. The limit-experience, he implied, was a positive personal "truth" that somehow undermined the negative "truths" of the modern state. In another attempt

to define this different kind of truth, he spoke of a truth that is the outcome of a ritual "ordeal." This truth is "provoked by rituals; it is attained by tricks, one seizes it only by chance: through strategy and not method."

Though Foucault often spoke of the political implications of this new form of truth, he also implied that a limit-experience might be its own reward – a moment of personal truth and freedom that does not necessarily lead to a political transformation. He implied that "the revolutionary experience," like the experience of taking drugs or engaging in bizarre sexual practices such as sadomasochism, is a transforming experience even if its political implications are not clear.

In 1982, two years before he died, Foucault maintained that he still wanted to "create a new way of life," yet in his later years he seemed to be less interested in political transformation than in finding a way to free himself from the burden of selfhood, a way, as he put it, of desubjectifying oneself. Sometimes, however, he spoke of the need to "invent himself." In the darkness of the self, the difference between these two quests is not easy to discern.

Foucault's preoccupation with defining the self may seem to be in accord with Nietzsche's injunction "to become what one is," but Nietzsche was not preoccupied with either finding or losing the self, and he probably would have regarded Foucault's preoccupation with the "limit-experience" contemptible, a sign of decadence. Foucault, though, is a descendant of Nietzsche insofar as he also cast a shadow on disinterestedness and put truth in quotation marks. Yet Foucault goes much further than Nietzsche in his repudiation of disinterestedness and objectivity.

Foucault's star is on the wane in France, but epistemological hypochondria remains a powerful force in the American academy, as is apparent from the following statement on the future of the humanities, made by the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) in a recent pamphlet: "As the most powerful modern philosophies and theories have been demonstrating, claims of disinterest, objectivity, and universality are not to be trusted, and themselves tend to reflect local historical conditions." The most powerful modern philosophies (whatever "powerful" means) have demonstrated no such thing, for it is impossible to demonstrate, that is, to give conclusive proof, that claims of disinterest are not to be trusted. If the ACLS is merely saying that everyone is to some degree driven by self-interest, it is uttering a meaningless truism that has no bearing on the question of evaluating scholarship. If the ACLS is saying that judging the quality of someone's scholarship is well-nigh impossible because everyone is a prisoner of a "regime of truth," it is endorsing radical subjectivism.

Few postmodernists would endorse such radical subjectivism. Yet if most of them balk at the idea that they too are prisoners of a regime of truth, the cloud they cast on the notion of disinterest makes it difficult to raise hard questions about a scholar's work. In such a climate of suspicion, outright lies often are tolerated as personal "truths." After hearing a lecture on the classical era that was filled with such personal "truths," the classicist Mary Lefkowitz wondered if "subjects like history and philosophy will be replaced by indoctrination, and each of us will believe the brand of 'truth' that best serves his or her own selfish purposes." Her fears may not be excessive, if the remarks of a Baltimore county school official are anything to go by. Claiming "we know for a fact that so much of history has been distorted, that it's very difficult to determine what is true," she said that "our responsibility is to present it all, and let the children sort it out." How will the children do the sorting when the teachers themselves have abandoned the criteria for evaluating competing truth claims? And who will choose the different brands of "truth"?

These brands are likely to be selected according to the principle of representation, because the road from suspicion inevitably leads to representation – to the notion that every group must be accorded a representative share of the curriculum. Representation may seem to be the answer to the problems that arise from the abandonment of disinterest, but no educational system can possibly respond to the clamor for representation on the part of myriad and competing and overlapping groups, such as those defined by race, sex, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, and so on.

In an interview given shortly before he died, Foucault seemed to be aware of the danger that postmodernist suspicion holds for intellectual life. Asked why he didn't engage in polemics, Foucault answered that "in the serious play of questions and answers, in the work of reciprocal elucidation, the rights of each person are in some sense immanent in the discussion." A serious discussion, Foucault implies, requires that all participants be given the benefit of the doubt, that everyone is assumed to be engaged in a disinterested search for the truth. According to Foucault, the polemicist takes a different view; he "proceeds encased in privileges that he possesses in advance and will never agree to question. . . . The person he confronts is *not a partner in the search for truth* [emphasis mine], but an adversary, an enemy who is wrong, who is harmful and whose very existence constitutes a threat." Foucault seems to have realized that "a partner in the search for the truth" must be presumed to be disinterested. Otherwise, no serious discussion is possible.

MILLCENT BELL

Fiction Chronicle

ACCORDION CRIMES. By E. Annie Proulx. Scribner. \$25.00.

WE WERE THE MULVANEYS. By Joyce Carol Oates. Dutton. \$24.95.

BABEL TOWER. By A. S. Byatt. Random House. \$25.95.

AN EXPERIMENT IN LOVE. By Hilary Mantel. Henry Holt & Co., Inc. \$23.00.

ALIAS GRACE. By Margaret Atwood. Nan A. Talese/Doubleday. \$24.95.

THE LAST THING HE WANTED. By Joan Didion. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. \$23.00.

Dipping into the turbid, rushing flow of novels this past year I discovered that a surprising majority of the best or most interesting had been written by women. Of course, women have *always* written novels – and some of these were *always* among the greatest; when they read Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë, Scott and Thackeray themselves admired and even envied something they could not have done. Women often understood, also, the way to win a more popular success than their male rivals; Hawthorne resented, declining to admire, the “scribbling women” who beat him out in the market. But the older novel seemed to have had two audiences rather than one. Virginia Woolf could still say in 1928 that to a female reader books by most male writers seemed written by only one half of the brain. Female writers, with access to the other half, were just as shut out from masculine sensibility. She hoped that the time was coming when the whole of human experience would flow into the books men and women could read together. As women’s lives would come to resemble men’s lives more and more, realistic novels about society or novels of external adventure would no longer be the exclusive products of male imagination; the novel of hearth and home, the novel of private emotion and personal sentiment, would belong as much to men as to women.

This has not exactly happened yet, and the idea of an “androgynous” imagination has not appealed to everyone – least of all to those feminist critics who insist on the specificity of a female tradition and a female voice to which female readers are exclusively responsive. Woolf also had said, “We think back through our mothers.” She even thought there was such a thing as a man’s sentence as distinct from a woman’s sentence, an idea that has not died out for those who insist on the totalizing determinism of

sexual difference. And it is true that some of the best novels written by women in our time show the persistent importance to female writers and readers of the condition of women and the trials of the female self – and, above all, of the female *sense* of these matters.

Sieving out of the stream some latest books by women, I find that one novelist who does not fear to draw upon the dominant traditions of male literary expression is the extraordinary E. Annie Proulx, who began to write fiction in 1992 when she was fifty-seven and has already won all the prizes – PEN-Faulkner, National Book Award, and Pulitzer – for her two previous books. *Accordion Crimes* is a sweeping epic, a *comédie humaine*, crowded with characters, rich in description of social habitats, class and group manners, varied speech patterns. It is also a virtuoso exploitation of the tradition of the male “road novel” that takes as its hero a button accordion which travels from hand to hand and connects in this fashion a rich succession of separate tales. At each stop we are plunged into the experience of two or more generations of American immigrants, following chiefly the adventures of men, perhaps because Proulx feels that more than women they have represented the extravagant expectations and the frustrations and recoveries of that “American Dream” which began as the dream of those who arrive here from another place. Proulx’s point of view shifts from one vivid small novella to another. Her characters replace each other as new Americans governed by their individual aspirations and prejudices and by the confronting circumstances, the physical and social landscape of this country. What such a method loses by surrender of attachment to the vibrations of a single personality, it makes up by panoramic scope and zooms of startling close vision. Her pages are dense with vivid particularities chosen with a cultural historian’s sense of signification. Her style, though compacted with this detail, is energetic, forward-moving, discovering in each sentence the next step of action. In the place of submersion in her characters’ consciousness she provides a sardonic poetry of Olympian insight.

Proulx’s American newcomer is generally poor, and his dreams are crushed by adversity and nativist prejudice or demeaned by paltry realization. But his child or grandchild rejects his ethnic past – recognizes himself “to be a poor, graceless, homely and uneducated Mick,” or believes that “Norwegians were a joke and their accent was a joke and they made themselves into jokes with stupid behavior and low comedy acts and songs.” And sometimes, with this submission to assimilation, prosperity arrives. There is a grim, naturalistic humor in the spectacle, and also in the inexorable briskness of the novelist as she takes us on from one to another “hyphenated” American with roots in Italy, Germany, Mexico, France, Africa, Poland, Ireland, Norway, or the country of the Basques.

The pattern is there from the start when an accordion maker from Sicily brings his ancient craft and native music to “La Merica” at the turn of the century. But our expectations of more story are cut off, like his hopes, by a lynch mob in New Orleans; his beloved accordion is lost, and his son, “burning with hatred for Sicilians,” escapes into the melting pot, casting off his name, “Silvano,” and calling himself “Bob Joe.” Next, three immigrant Germans arrive in an abandoned prairie town where they will settle, send for their German brides, become through toil and skill the most prosperous farmers in the region but, with the advent of World War I, find themselves victims of anti-German persecution. For only a short while their special way of living and feeling, their German habits and tastes, have flourished, and the little accordion, which has turned up in a Keokuk lumberyard, has helped to bring German band music into the American space. The wandering squeeze box travels on. It will appear in Texas as the favorite instrument of a great Latino player of “conjunto” music who works as a busboy and whose children suffer the humiliations and cultural mutilations of non-Anglo selfhood. Growing a little more battered with each transfer, the accordion is the sole legacy from an unknown French father left to an abandoned child who grows up in an orphanage in Maine; he has no other clue than his name, “Dolor” (meaning sorrow), to the music, the identity, which he strives and fails to recover. Still capable of song, the instrument falls into the hands of a black “zydeco” player who pawns it in Chicago when his luck runs out. It moves on to further sojourns, each time witnessing the wrenching loss of heritage, the shame that succeeds pride for Polish slaughterhouse workers and cigar rollers, or for a Basque sheep herder, or a Norwegian lumberjack whose son scavenges throw-out junk for flea market sale but finally makes a fortune out of a dismantled funeral home and buys a ranch in Montana and a beach house in Tahiti.

One of the best chapters plunges us into the integral communal world of Polish immigrants who hate blacks no poorer than themselves in Chicago’s “back of the yards.” Accordions play polkas at picnics and weddings until rock bands take up a polka beat. In the end, a second-generation Polish accordion player and his wife weary of the grueling music-contest circuit, the stop-offs at sleazy motels with carsick kids, the ripoffs and disappointment of the road. They move “first to Koskiusko, Texas, then to Panna Maria, where Joey started a catfish farm, branched out into raising ladybugs for the organic garden market, and in a decade made a modest fortune but showed he wasn’t proud by still shopping at the Smoga store.” When they leave Chicago the little accordion goes onto the yard sale table,

with a Charlie Tuna camera, polystyrene dump trucks and guns, a Bakelite yo-yo with a frayed string, a one-legged Barbie doll, tiny useless hands raised in supplication, a desk lamp in the form of a translucent goose, acrylic rulers, a partial set of pale yellow discolored melamine plates, an atom bomb saltshaker, a waffle iron, a candy box half-filled with thread-jammed buttons, a loom of pop-it beads, three empty flashlights, a sagging box of Polonia clarions and a stack of old 78s.

Joyce Carol Oates, who in twenty-six novels has already tried out every fictional mode, has been alternately embraced and rejected by votaries of a feminist literary consciousness. Her newest, *We Were the Mulvaney*s, is a novel of traditional form, a family chronicle, though with female experience at its center. Hers, too, like Proulx's, is the story of the dissolution of a dream, in this case the dream of the lovingly united American family living untroubledly at the heart of American community. Their small eccentricities are no problem to the Mulvaney's; they add a note of humor to the bland tv serial of their days. They live in a tastefully restored (painted lavender!) "storybook house" in the Chautauqua Valley, and everything is hunky-dory: Mr. Mulvaney is a rising roofing contractor who has been admitted to the Country Club despite his lower-class Irish origins, and Mom's fey personality could not be more endearing; she conducts an unserious antique business in the barn, rarely selling anything because she falls in love with the items she has scrounged in second-hand shops. The eldest son is the high school football star. The middle son is the brightest boy in his class, the future valedictorian. The nicest of "nice girls" daughter Marianne is a cheerleader everyone loves.

Into this Eden comes catastrophe. Marianne returns home after a school dance having been raped by one of her classmates in his car. And from this moment the life of the Mulvaney's becomes past tense. Marianne is unwilling to testify against her assaulter, and her father gets arrested when he tries to visit his fury upon this popular son of a respected family. Mulvaney's friendships wither; his business founders; he drinks more and more heavily. He no longer can even bear the sight of his favorite child, and she is cruelly exiled to live with a distant cousin. The Mulvaney's move out of the town which has rejected them. Revenge upon the rapist is later achieved by the bright son who abandons his college studies to waylay his sister's destroyer and nearly murder him. But Marianne, humbly unresentful, drifts gently on, working first in a student commune, then in an animal hospital whose director she marries. In the end, the family is united though fatherless.

With practiced skill Oates makes her scenes believable, furnishes her tale with detail and incident, and almost persuades us to accept the reality of the Mulvaney's. But something seems wrong. Doubt surges into one's mind about the universal obloquy visited upon a rape victim and her family, even in a small American town, so recently as 1976 (the historical locus of the novel). Could there have still been no awareness of the phenomenon now called "date rape" – no one among the Mulvaney's many friends who failed to draw aside from the victim and her disgraced family? That she should be so totally rejected by her father seems even more incredible, though we do understand the injury inflicted upon his masculine pride. Mulvaney goes too precipitately from stalwart strength to collapse, and Oates provides no adequate psychic grounding for such unfeeling casting off. As hard to accept is the acquiescence of Marianne's mother to her daughter's banishment, her Pollyanna complacency that all is for the best. Her final status as a figure of unblemished maternity seems unearned. Barely believable – and hardly as admirable as the author seems to assume – is poor Marianne, who blames herself for getting raped despite the fact that her struggles against her attacker are evident to the family doctor. Religious piety is the mainstay of her humility, though a skeptic may wonder at the savage internalization of pain represented by such piety.

The writer is entitled to her view of experience, but fiction must contain its own self-critical energy or die. Oates denies us the possibility of questioning her premises by the very structure of her novel, which submits itself to the outward declarations of her characters without irony, requiring us to accept not only Marianne's Christian forgivingness but also her mother's creed that life is an inscrutable working-out of the Divine Will. In the unspoken thoughts of this *mater dolorosa* one might have found the true anguish of a conflict between those female roles which cleave her either to her husband or to the daughter whom men have abused. Oates seems to have wanted to avoid as much as possible the author-character relation available to her as a female writer. She avoids the female viewpoint by donating a large part of the narrative to Marianne's youngest brother rather than to either of the women in her tale, though his maleness places him far from his sister's or mother's consciousness, incapable of surmising the internal changes that might explain Marianne's beatification or the older woman's betrayal. His youth also keeps him from fully understanding his father's deterioration, his brother's transformation from an ambitious scholar to a maddened avenger. So inadequate is he as a window onto the real life of the Mulvaney's that one is tempted to suspect Oates of a greater literary subtlety than she may have intended – a covert parodic purpose which exposes the hollowness of sentimentality and complacency in their fallen world.

The gifted English writer A. S. Byatt has most recently become famous for her bravura historic reconstruction and intellectual detective fiction, the prize-winning novel, *Possession*, and for a Darwinian Victorian fantasy on the theme that human society is like that of the ant, which was made into the recent movie, *Angels and Insects*. But eighteen years ago she embarked on a chronicle expressing her own generational experience as someone like her heroine Frederica Potter – “a slightly transgressive, independent woman.” She planned a sequence of four novels, and now has published *Babel Tower*, her third after *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978) and *Still Life* (1985), bringing Frederica to the era of the sixties. When the new “Orange Prize” (\$46,000) ticketed for woman writers was awarded in Britain this past summer, Byatt protested that it “ghettoized” writers like herself. Clearly she is interested in a great many things besides the subject of being female. She is interested in biological and social theory, the nature and function of human language, the future of education, the relation of modern England to the past still present in landscapes and human behavior, the division between classes, and a dozen other topics, and her new book is very much a novel of ideas. It has a multitude of characters; it is a many-stranded history which also folds another fiction, a fantasy commenting upon the times, into its fabric. Yet the central story it carries forward is clearly a female *Bildungsroman*, an authorial self-questioning about the shaping of female destiny.

Frederica’s dilemma is commonplace enough. She married without quite knowing what she was about. Her own physical urgency and the unpersuasive appeal of the young men she met at the university had propelled her into the arms of Nigel Rivers, unintellectual, domineering, the kind of man who boasted, “If you say, ‘I love you’ to a woman, it makes her wet.” Reading, paradoxically, had also betrayed her at the Cambridge of F. R. Leavis, where she had accepted the Lawrentian doctrine “that the body is truth,” that love-in-the-head is evil; she had taken her subjection to Nigel’s sexual force as proof that she was arriving at that ardor beyond words reached by Lady Chatterley. She had been captivated, too, by Nigel’s upper-class swank; a schoolteacher’s daughter from Yorkshire, she had fallen for his gentry glamor and Forster’s *Howard’s End* had instructed, “Only connect,” as though her marriage would effect the union of the classes England needed. But, in fact, Nigel’s posh country estate proved to be a prison and her husband a boring jailor who turned Bluebeard and beat her when she tried to escape.

Escape she does, though, to a London full of old friends and new, representatives of a changing time. She takes her child with her but lives independently, working as a teacher and publisher’s reader. And she prepares for the struggle which will climax in the court trial that first denies

her custody of her son but eventually restores him to her. Meanwhile, she has become involved with another legal battle over a book she recommended to her firm, a book which – like *Lady Chatterley* – becomes the object of an obscenity trial.

The structure of Byatt's novel is ambitiously chaotic – as though to deny the connectedness of things which its heroine is having such difficulty establishing. Sliced into the narrative of Frederica's personal adventures are transcripts of the two trials and other elements – such as discussions among members of a committee appointed to consider the state of education in England, and the recounting of bold and original fairy tales for children composed by another single mother. We participate in Frederica's further discoveries in literature as a teacher in an evening class for adults as well as in her developing relation with her small son, and her new but by no means conclusive love affairs. The reader is supplied with excerpts from Frederica's own writing, the germs of the novelist she will, like her maker, eventually become. In her diary she experiments with scissors and paste, cutting up and putting together bits of texts, searching, in this wreckage of conventional coherence, for serendipitous revelations – whether the texts are legal documents or the writings of such gurus of current wisdom as R. D. Laing, Norman Brown, Allen Ginsberg. The result is a patchwork which represents the mood of the times in the sixties.

More questionable is the incorporation of what seems to be the entire book that is under trial for obscenity, its chapters alternating with chapters of the story of Frederica and modern England. This novel-within-the-novel, which occupies far too many pages of the whole, is beneath the level of Byatt's enveloping text. It is a labored dystopic satire which relates the fate of a company of refugees from the French Revolution who seek to achieve an ideal society of perfect freedom in a "Babbletower" hidden from the world – and fall into further and further extravagances of polymorphous sex and sadism. The object of critique is, obviously, sixties libertarianism. But it is hard to see how this relates to Frederica's actual world where the phenomenon is quite invisible, and it does not cast light on her own quest. Though the depravities to which the Babbletower commune descends are only mildly pornographic, the invention and style of this encapsulated fiction are too feeble to deserve the *Lady Chatterley* defense of literary quality.

Byatt's massive book is more than two-and-a-half times the length of Hilary Mantel's novel about another English girl who possibly resembles the author, *An Experiment in Love*. With the rest of the social scene present only by implication, Mantel focuses on her female coming-of-age story. Carmel McBain, like Frederica Potter, is a young seeker from the north of

England whose starting point is well outside the world of established privilege, though more decidedly working class, and Irish Catholic instead of Protestant or agnostic. Fifteen or more years after Frederica, Carmel also makes it to the University – London rather than Cambridge – where her crisis of self-definition occurs. No less than Byatt's heroine, she must discover who she is in terms of the social categories of gender and class.

Mantel's first-person narrative is terse and a little mysterious, suggesting much more than it admits to; her heroine's language expresses a sardonic poetic vision. Life began, she remembers, in a depressed textile town where the mill, "struggled on with antiquated machinery, which it was not worth the cost of replacing; the workers too were aging, and by the time of my middle childhood were a parody of themselves, a southerner's idea of the north. Under the factory walls of plum-coloured brick, stained black from the smoke and daily rain, plodded thick-set men in bib and brace, with shorn hair and flat caps: and angry-looking women in checkered head-scarves, with elastic stockings and shoes like boats. Beyond the mill chimneys, you could see the line of hills." The McBains just scrape along on her father's salary as a clerk but her mother ("She had a firm jaw, and a loud carrying voice. Her hair was greying and wild and held back with springing kirby grips. When she frowned, a cloud passed over the street. When she raised her eyebrows – as she often did, amazed each hour by what God expected her to endure – a small town's tram system sprang up on her forehead") is intensely ambitious for this daughter, dresses her in pretentious home-sewn clothes and skewers her to her studies. Carmel gets admitted to a genteel convent school and passes the entrance exams for the university.

With her on this journey of upward mobility are two companions. Karina's family is East European refugee – Carmel is never sure of the exact nationality ("Polish, Ukranian, Estonian?"), but something far more alien than Irish. They can hardly speak English and work relief shifts in the mills. Mrs. McBain patronizes them and coerces Carmel to look after sullen Karina. But Karina needs no looking after. A tough little sphinx with her own eye on getting ahead, she simpers at her teachers, is her mother's prop at home, and snickers at her rivals – and she, too, passes all the exams. Carmel's attitude is one of mixed hatred and guilt; in nursery school she had let herself go to the point of kicking Karina's doll; forever after she felt obliged to be this ultimate outsider's best friend. Carmel's closer friend at the convent school and the university is, however, Julianne, who is middle-class, intelligent and articulate, a sophisticated mentor who has already rejected religion and accepted active sex and feminism – the person she wants to be rather than, like Karina, the person she fears to resemble. As the grown-up Carmel begins her narrative, she is jogged into

recollection by a newspaper photo of Julia (as Julianne has renamed herself), now a successful Highgate psychiatrist: "There was a blur where her face should be, and yet I noted the confident set of her arms, and I could imagine her expression: professionally watchful, maternal, with that broad cold smile which I have known since I was eleven years old."

In the student hostel in London where these three continue their growth towards adulthood they make other friends. One of them is Lynette Segal who is the only daughter of a rich (Jewish?) family. There is something fairy-tale about her; she is beautiful and innocent and generous. She shares her fancy candy from home and lends her fox coat, and unhesitatingly pays for another girl's abortion. She puts up with unsympathetic Karina as a roommate because no one else will. Julianne – who may have had an abortion, too, but has discreetly managed things herself and is safely on the Pill – continues to grow up handsome and soignée – and studies medicine. Carmel, scrimping on her state grant, starves herself skinny, has a love affair which runs out, becomes anorexic – and studies law. About Karina's ultimate destiny we can only guess.

Mantel is very good at evoking the black comedy of a subject which in other hands would be trite – the schoolgirl and undergraduate view of teachers and dorm mistresses and Health Service doctors, those inheritors of the authority abdicated by parents; the uneasy jollity of unisex life and the farcical schemes by which relation with the opposite sex is consummated, the close fellowship of incompatible personalities, the clash of ideas and the response to political movements and intellectual fads, the way disaster may lie in wait beneath the surface of jokes and fun and the preoccupation with food and clothes. Tragedy does erupt when fire breaks out in the hostel one night and the girls are rushed outside. Shivering in their nightgowns, they watch as the flames mount through the building and glimpse a single figure at a window, flames radiating from head and chest. It is Lynette. At Carmel's side in the street stands Karina with the fox coat over her arm, and a room key slips out of its pocket to the ground before Karina puts her foot on it.

Was Karina a murderer who turned that key on Lynette? Carmel does not say, nor does she comment on what might have been the sources of such murderousness – the rage of the looked-down-upon ugly duckling who recognizes condescension everywhere, the person at the bottom whose heart is filled with class envy and racial hostility. It is a staggering ending in which the illuminated figure dying in the flames gains a martyr's status. The novel's title, *An Experiment in Love*, is worth pondering. If the attempt to love the other was Carmel's, she has surely failed.

Margaret Atwood's aim in *Alias Grace*, a book whose title also has a religious sound, is still more obscure. This extraordinary book is a brilliant

achievement of the imagination, a re-invention of fact of such hallucinatory vividness that one would suppose the writer had witnessed every moment of the true history of the 1840s upon which it is based. Before any other appeal the story this novel relates has the appeal of a mystery still unsolved which had its contrary interpreters in its own time. Grace Marks was a sixteen-year-old serving girl who was sentenced to life imprisonment for her part in the murder of her employer, a Canadian landowner named Thomas Kinnear; her supposed accomplice, James McDermott, also a servant of Kinnear's, was hanged for this murder as well as for the murder of Kinnear's housekeeper and mistress, Nancy Montgomery. The particular gruesomeness of the murders, and the suspicion of an erotic snake's nest in which Grace was in love with Kinnear while McDermott *and* his employer had been making love to both women, aroused the lubricity of contemporary newspaper readers. But Grace's youth and beauty drew defenders; there were those who thought she might have been quite innocent, a mere witness dragged along by Montgomery in his flight across the border. She herself had confessed her guilt but later claimed that she could not remember taking direct part in the murders; she was at one point deemed insane and at another sane and responsible.

Atwood has structured her novel as detective fiction and invented a fictional detective-investigator who, some years later, burrows for the truth. He is a young Boston doctor, a specialist in the infant field of psychology who claims to be interested not so much in the determination of guilt as in the phenomenon of memory, particularly what Freud would later call buried memory. By patiently and repeatedly interviewing the twenty-three-year-old Grace at the Kingston penitentiary, Simon Jordan hopes to bring her to the point of recalling the horrific moments that lie deep in her mind.

Simon has his own adventure in Kingston – a sexual liaison with his landlady from which he struggles to escape as he returns again and again, with passionate attentiveness and growing love, to his interviews with Grace. His method is to begin at the beginning with her earliest recollections and lead her gently forward to later scenes. These confessions which never confess what the listener is most curious to hear make up the bulk of Atwood's pages. They constitute a narrative of exquisite clarity and unconscious eloquence replete with details and shrewd wit – the narrative of a kind of life seldom recorded, that of the humblest of working women of a past time. Out of *history's* buried memory Atwood brings forth a marvelous evocation of the child Grace, one of nine in an impoverished Irish family that emigrated to Canada, the miseries of the voyage, the exact conditions of daily life after they arrived, and the commencement of her

career as a household servant when she was eleven or twelve, separated from her own family forever. She passes from one situation to the next, learning as she goes every aspect of housekeeping, keenly observing her employers and their houses, taking an expert's joy in her proficiency, particularly in her mastery of laundry and needlework. Out of these mundane details something visionary arises: at Mr. Kinnear's home before the murders have occurred, she sees "the shirts and nightgowns flapping in the breeze on a sunny day. . . . like large white birds, or angels rejoicing, although without any heads." She describes, from time to time, the quilts she has worked on – and Atwood uses their mysterious names – Jagged Edge, Rocky Road, Broken Dishes, Secret Drawer, Snake Fence – as suggestive titles to her chapters which are like pieces of diverse fabric stitched together in an ancient pattern. Like Grace's story, they can be read differently by the beholder; the quilt called Attic Windows "had a great many pieces, and if you looked at it one way it was closed boxes, and when you looked at it another way the boxes were open."

Only implicitly does Grace's narrative reveal the emotional life of the adolescent girl; she lives chiefly in the lives of others. At one grand house she makes a beloved friend – the only one she will ever have – of a slightly older servant. Mary Whitney is mischievous and fiery; she offers an alternate selfhood to the frightened Grace: "Sometimes when I would be shocked at her, she would say that I would soon be singing mournful hymns . . . and going around with a mouth pulled down all glum and saggy like an old maid's backside; and I would protest, and we would end by laughing." Mary is seduced, however, by their employer's son, and dies after a botched abortion.

Mary Whitney persists in the story, however. She remains the image of friendship which Grace will fail to find again in the dishonest and selfish Nancy, and Grace will assume Mary Whitney's name when she tries to escape with McDermott. Mary's spirit, in one sense or another, erupts at the end when Simon, despairing of finding that primal truth he seeks, submits Grace to the operations of a mesmerist. A strange, raucous, mocking voice bursts out of the tranced Grace's mouth, identifying itself as Mary's; it is *she* who murdered Nancy, "borrowing [Grace's] . . . fleshly garment." A tale of possession, then – or of multiple personality – or of the complex duplicity of feminine character as Atwood conceives it? Was Mary the true self for which Grace was an "alias"?

The governing consciousness who figures in the latest novel by Joan Didion is also female, but it is a female consciousness unlike that of the novels considered above. If it resembles the author's own state of mind, that awareness, suffering deeply from acedia yet sleeplessly attentive, which registers appearances in her non-fictional writings, it is also a consciousness

already familiar in previous Didion novels. Like Didion herself, the “not quite omniscient author” who now and then seems to present some part of the story, or to comment on it, or to declare her inability to comment on it, is a woman reporter, and the person fitfully glanced at is another woman reporter who may double the resemblance to the Didion persona. Elena McMahon in *The Last Thing He Wanted* is a sister of Maria Wyeth of *Play It As It Lays* (1970), Charlotte Douglas in *A Book of Common Prayer* (1977), Inez Victor in *Democracy* (1984).

All are survivors of the amputation of traditional connections to life – particularly the relations of family love. All have lost, for example, a daughter, and their condition might be described as an enactment of the myth of Ceres, the rupture of female continuity: Maria’s daughter is a hostile patient in a mental hospital, Charlotte’s is wanted for a terrorist bombing, Inez’s is a drug addict. But it is only a minor index of Elena’s separation from connectedness of any sort that when she leaves her husband, an L.A. multimillionaire, her daughter blames her for the evaporation of what she thinks of as a “real life” – the Jacuzzi, the pool, the tennis court, the three cars; “You could open the door in Malibu and be at the beach.” It is really misleading to think of the separation of Ceres and Persephone when talking about Joan Didion’s characters. They do not expect to achieve reconnection with daughters or anything else. The discontinuities they represent are more absolute. In Elena’s life, ruptures occur with a joyless spontaneity; it is never entirely clear why she throws over her Malibu life when she does, why she remakes herself into a journalist, or why this role is in turn abandoned. In the gaps of this narrative we may read Didion’s sense of the arbitrariness of personal histories.

And, indeed, Joan Didion is as far as possible from writing a novel about womanhood. Quite as much as Annie Proulx, for example, she is the narrator – in the most compressed and elliptic of fictional structures – of general history. The time is the summer of 1984 and Iran-contra is building up in the secret corridors of government and along the airways to Central America:

You know the context, you remember the names, Theodore Shackley
Clair George Dewey Clarridge Richard Secord Alan Fiers Felix
Rodriguez aka “Max Gomez” John Hull Southern Air Lake
Resources Stanford Technology Donald Gregg Aguacate Elliott
Abrams Robert Owen aka “T.C.” Ilopango aka “Cincinnati,” all
swimming together in the glare off the C-123 that fell from the sky
into Nicaragua. Not many women got caught in the glare. There was
one, the blonde, the shredder, the one who transposed the numbers of

the account at the Credit Suisse (the account of the Credit Suisse into which the Sultan of Brunei was to transfer the ten million dollars, in case you have forgotten the minor plays), but she had only a bit part, day work, a broadly comic but not in the end featured role.

Elena McMahon was different.

Elena McMahon got caught, but not in the glare.

Elena has abandoned the Malibu life and is covering the 1984 Presidential campaign for the *Washington Post* when, standing on the tarmac at LAX after the rally in South Central, the meet-and-greet at the Maravilla project, the celebrity fundraiser under the Regal Rents party tent, she finds that her name had been left off the manifest – and walks off the beat. As the campaign goes on to San Jose, she flies to Miami to visit her dying father. He is a small-time wheeler-dealer who may have once worked for the C.I.A. and is at last about to make a killing by sending a planeload of fragmentation mines to the Caribbean; the stake is a million dollars. She takes over for him, escorts the cargo to an island where, unaccountably, she is just stuck; there is no ride back and she has no valid passport. So, she lingers amid the palms and the sunshine and the general atmosphere of seedy conspiracy and finally meets Treat Morrison, a C.I.A. “crisis junkie” who has served six presidents. He may have wanted to help her. Didion allows a frail suggestion of love (“This is a romance after all”) to enter into this somber espionage thriller and fits it out that way for further life as a movie, though the ending may have to be modified. Elena is killed by a member of the local police who claims to have intercepted her attempt to assassinate Morrison, who is, indeed, shot, though by someone else. It was “the last thing he wanted.” Her father has already been reported dead in Miami.

Some of Didion’s critics feel that here, as elsewhere, she has already composed a movie script rather than the sort of novel for which Graham Green provided a model – the novel that is only superficially an “entertainment” about intrigue in the third world but really, instead, a political melodrama in which the exotic background and the interaction of characters compose an allegory of colonialism. Didion’s art is, in fact, a postmodern drama about American imperialism. This slight novel’s ellipses, scene shifts, scrambles of comment and direct vision concentrate the reader’s anxious attention upon a terrifying moral vacuity. Its pages are crowded with notational images that attain a metaphoric power and passages that brilliantly parody the pseudo-languages of government, business, the contemporary wasteland.

PAUL HOLLANDER

Revisiting “The Banality of Evil”: Political Violence in Communist Systems

The demise of Soviet Communism has opened up new possibilities for increasing our understanding of political violence in this century. We are now in a far better position to compare and in doing so narrow the gap between what we know about the two most murderous political systems in this century: Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, especially under Stalin. Western and especially American levels of information and moral awareness of the political violence perpetrated by Nazi Germany are far greater than those of comparable activities of the Soviet Union and other Communist states. Correspondingly far more is known about the Nazi planners, organizers and executors of political violence and coercion than of their Communist counterparts. There are numerous studies of the major figures of Nazi political violence such as Adolf Eichman, Joseph Goebbels, Heinrich Himmler and Rudolf Hess (the latter the commander of Auschwitz), of the elite troops and personnel assigned to these tasks (the SS and Gestapo), of the defendants of the Nuremberg Trials which established new standards for war crimes and politically motivated mass murders. Specific theories and concepts have been devised to conceptualize and understand Nazi murderousness and repression, such as “the banality of evil,” “desk murderers,” “authoritarian personality,” and “obedience to authority.” By any measure, corresponding information about the specialists in coercion and organizers of mass violence in Communist systems has been far more limited.

Even more striking is that some Western visitors to Communist societies formed favorable impressions of their leading specialists in coercion and political violence, and of their penal institutions (based usually on conducted tours of model prisons) just as grotesquely misperceiving them as they did the political system as a whole. Romain Rolland referred to Genrikh Yagoda, who was in charge of Soviet repressions in the 1930s as “fine-featured, distinguished. . . . [and] . . . impregnated with sweetness.” Henry Wallace and Owen Lattimore on a conducted tour of Soviet concentration camps in Kolyma were most favorably impressed by camp

commander Ivan Nikishov. More recently Tomas Borge, head of the Nicaraguan state security, charmed Günter Grass as well as numerous American political tourists; an American professor of philosophy at my school thought Borge was a good poet and “ran a prison system known as one of the most progressive in the world.” It was by no means an exceptional misjudgment of communist prison systems.

Political violence and its perpetrators in the now defunct Communist systems are of interest because better information about them – increasingly available – sheds further light on the issue of the “banality of evil” (introduced by Hannah Arendt to account for the character and behavior of Nazi mass murderers) as opposed to other theories of causation. In particular much remains to be learned about the relationship between beliefs and behavior when mass murders are designed and carried out.

The attitudes of those who worked for the KGB (and their equivalents in other Communist states) are also of special interest since, arguably, the collapse of Communist systems might be explained in part by their declining willingness to continue to suppress dissent or opposition. If indeed there was an erosion of political will and reflexive ruthlessness at the top of the political hierarchy, it presumably extended to the specialists in coercion as well, who were most directly responsible for maintaining the social-political order. (This erosion amounted to virtual paralysis, as became clear during the botched coup attempt against Gorbachev in 1991.) Markus Wolf, the former head of general and foreign intelligence of the East German Stasi suggested that “people didn’t fight to keep it [the system] alive” because it “didn’t correspond to our ideals.” If indeed the perceived discrepancy between ideals and realities translated into the declining morale of the state security forces, it would be a most dramatic illustration of the impact of political disillusionment on the survival of the system.

We have limited knowledge of how the attitudes of the people directly involved with the coercive apparatus differed from those in other positions of power. Were they especially determined to resist threats to the integrity of their worldview? Did they fall back on different rationalizations for their activities? For how long did they succeed in convincing themselves that the very unpleasantness of the tasks they undertook was proof of their virtue and moral uprightness? Or were they simply cynics to begin with? It is hard to know what proportion of them were “idealists” and how many were attracted primarily by the elite status and the perks these positions guaranteed, or what mixture of motives were present. Presumably with the passage of time the number of corrupt careerists rose at the expense of the stern idealists.

There seem to be four models or archetypes of the specialists in coer-

cion (and political violence) implicit in the existing literature, including that which deals with the Nazi case. In the first group are the ideologically driven, supposedly incorruptible, puritanical executioners (metaphorically speaking), exemplified in the Soviet case perhaps by Feliks Dzerzhinsky and Himmler in the Nazi one.

Resulting in part from the influence of Hannah Arendt the former type came to be eclipsed in popular as well as scholarly thinking by individuals of the second type such as Eichman personifying the "banality of evil." These were supposedly very ordinary human beings who found themselves in situations which imposed on them these unappealing roles; they followed orders without being driven by strong convictions. Money and privilege were sometimes factors, as in the former Soviet Union and communist Czechoslovakia where even within the state security system there was distaste for domestic or internal surveillance. According to one former employee "No one wanted to do this work – arresting and interrogating political people. So it paid well." As time went by the morale of the Czech state security declined: "By the end of the 1980s the StB didn't believe its own propaganda." Certainly in the lower echelons, convictions were not an essential occupational requirement, and underlings had better reasons to shift blame to their superiors, as in the obedience-to-authority scenario. Among the latter even a former colonel in the KGB argued, "The system made us develop hostility to each other, the system itself! . . . Hostility, revenge, denunciations, spy mania, all that was encouraged – all stemming from the man himself, the man with the mustache. From top to bottom these base instincts were encouraged!" He did have a point: these attitudes were indeed encouraged but not everybody responded in the same way to such encouragement.

Not only former KGB officials, but even those who eagerly cooperated with the regime in the regimentation of the arts resorted to time-honored excuses and rationalizations. One of them was Tikhon Khrennikov, a mediocre official composer and favorite of Stalin. He became infamous for the denunciation of Prokofiev and Shostakovich in 1948. More recently he asserted that he merely obeyed the order of the Central Committee, "he didn't write the speech that was thrust into his hands a few hours before he was due to speak." Moreover, "Nobody could say no to Stalin . . . My conscience is clear. . . . You had to live in that atmosphere to understand what was going on."

Apparently the conscience of Vladimir Kryuchkov, the last head of the KGB (and leader of the 1991 putsch attempt against Gorbachev) was also clear. In a conversation with the American journalist and author David Remnick, he said:

If there has to be repentance [for KGB activities], then let everyone repent. You should repent for what you've done to the Indians . . . If you repent, we will too. My attitude toward Stalin is clear: I condemn the repressions. I condemn the totalitarian forms of rule that Stalin developed . . . He became the head of the Soviet state when there was only a plow, and left it when the state had an atomic bomb . . . Believe me in twenty or thirty years Stalin will be referred to as a kind of genius.

Earlier in the conversation Kryuchkov also averred that he had “nothing to do with the struggle against dissent,” which led his interlocutor to conclude that he “seemed perfectly capable of lying with a serene sense of self-possession and righteousness,” another apparent qualification for the position he had filled.

The third type of the specialists emerges from more recent references to the personnel of the KGB, portrayed as well-educated, often suave careerists who found satisfactory employment and mobility opportunities in this organization. Sometimes an adventurous disposition contributed to the attractions of such employment, as in the case of former General Oleg Kalugin who also claimed patriotic motives in joining the intelligence gathering branch of the KGB.

It is the fourth group – seemingly composed of individuals who gravitate toward the organizations of violence and coercion, and their repugnant activities – that has attracted the least social scientific interest. Victor Serge, an old Soviet revolutionary observed during the first years of the October Revolution the contrast between such individuals and the Dzerzhinsky types:

The Party endeavoured to head it [the Cheka, that is, the first embodiment of the KGB] with incorruptible men like . . . Dzerzhinsky, a sincere idealist, ruthless but chivalrous, with the emaciated profile of an Inquisitor . . . But the Party had few men of this stamp and many Chekas: these gradually came to select their personnel by virtue of their psychological inclinations. The only temperaments that devoted themselves willingly and tenaciously to this task of ‘internal defense’ were those characterized by suspicion, embitterment, harshness and sadism. Long-standing social inferiority-complexes and memories of humiliations and suffering in the Tsars’ jails rendered them intractable, and since professional degeneration has rapid effects, the Chekas inevitably consisted of perverted men tending to see conspiracy everywhere and to live in the midst of perpetual conspiracy themselves.

Similar tendencies were also observed in the Hungarian state security police (AVO or AVH). According to one former victim and analyst of the organization, the writer George Paloczi-Horvath:

The SP [security police] was constantly purged by General Peter [that is, Gabor Peter, the head of it]. Many former SP officers were with us in jail. They were arrested for the slightest sign of elementary decency. With this method General Peter succeeded in finding in a few years that criminal and potentially sadistic five per cent which is there in any given population.

The idea that in every society there are groups of people who, for whatever reason, possess, or develop a personality congenial for the activities repressive police forces require has been noted by many authors. The Brazilian man of letters Antonio Candido observed that for these tasks "... society needs thousands of individuals with appropriately deformed souls ... society draws from these people the brutality, the need, the frustration, the depravity, the defect – and gives them the repressive function." The Czech emigré writer Josef Skvorecky, perceived the hardcore supporters of both Nazi and Communist systems as

... people scarred by private hatreds, grounded in deeply negative personal experience ... [people] with physical or psychological malformations ... haunted by a feeling of insecurity. ... exploit[ing] ideas and movements to achieve a feeling of self-worth and to devalue other people.

A connection between official policies and less than creditable human traits was also noted by Luba Brezhneva, the niece of Leonid Brezhnev:

Continual official calls for crackdowns on the 'enemies of the people' [in the 1930s, that is] had awakened the basest instincts, and searching out enemies evolved as part of the national psychology ... Informers were praised and held up as role models for the youths; they were also given financial rewards and promotions ...

Doubtless, many intolerant, vindictive, resentful and authoritarian human beings found their way into the Communist political police forces – institutions that provided a sense of entitlement and philosophical legitimation for indulging their impulses and inclinations. Erich Mielke, a head

of Stasi may qualify as such a prototype in whom a variety of unappealing personality traits and ideological convictions were mutually supportive, as David Pryce-Jones observed:

He had risen from rigging show trials to run the Stasi in 1957 . . . Thuggish and greedy, he was also vain. The list which he drew up of his 250 medals and orders covered eighteen pages . . . in an echo of Herman Goering . . . [in his office] . . . is a portrait of Felix Dzerzhinsky, Lenin's policeman and killer-in-chief, a death mask of Lenin . . .

The arguments sketched above are in obvious and stark contrast to that popularized by Hannah Arendt and taken up with seeming relish by many Western intellectuals and the general public in the last few decades: the belief that mass murderers were ordinary, "normal" people, undistinguished by any moral stigma or deformity, who found themselves in situations which led to their brutal behavior, and that virtually anybody could become one under the appropriate circumstances. (The receptivity to this thesis points to a strong social critical impulse: if all of us are so corruptible, it says something about the type of society that produced us; collective responsibility, "complicity" removes the moral distinctions between perpetrator and all those who were spared only by luck to be thrust in the same roles; attention is diverted from the individual to the social circumstances and pressures.) Stanley Milgram's ingenious experiments on obedience to authority have also been strongly supportive of this point of view.

It may of course also be argued that the four categories outlined cannot be easily separated, that they overlap especially when both material and "moral" incentives play a part. Thus, reportedly the Hungarian political police officers "were trained . . . for devotion, blind discipline and were at the same time filled with a consciousness of mission and professional pride . . . Their self-confidence was further inflated by the fact that they could fill their pockets with various allowances, bonuses and benefits . . ."

If Nazi leaders engaged in the large-scale extermination of civilians could shift responsibility to higher authority and ultimately to Hitler, their Communist counterparts had an even more helpful device at their disposal to accomplish similar ends: the myth of the infallibility of the Party. (They could also rely on beliefs deriving from Marxism-Leninism, especially the notion that they were on the right side of the historical process.) It was an article of faith among them that the Party was a unique, chosen instrument of history and historical justice. Whatever served the purposes and policies of this entity was beyond judgment. George Kennan's

observation about Andrei Gromyko applies to many of them: "... the Party became ... his mother, his father, his teacher, his conscience, and his master. He was never to question its ideals, its authority, its moral purity" The Party could be divorced from the errors of particular human beings who belonged to it, led it, and who were mortal; it transcended the life-span of the individual. Kennan further observed:

... for anything undertaken in response to the will of the collectivity (in this instance the Party), no matter how distasteful, no matter how unattractive from the standpoint of individual morality, there could be no guilt, no questioning, no remorse. And if it turned out that what the Party required to be done ... involved apparent injustice or cruelty – well, one might regret that it was found necessary, one might wish that it could have been otherwise; but it was not one's own responsibility.

It was a part of Communist political culture – originating in the early Soviet political practices and traditions – that, as Nathan Leites put it

... it became ... forbidden to admit in public that any act of the Party was regrettable ... All acts of the Party are presented in public as entirely desirable. ... [Moreover] the Party must be prepared to inflict any amount of deprivation on any number of human beings if this appears 'necessary' ... The refusal to use necessary bad means appears to the Bolshevik as an expression of stupidity ... or as imperfect dedication to the great goal; or as self-centeredness which keeps one more concerned with not touching dirt and not feeling guilt than with transforming the world ...

George Lukacs, himself not involved in the dirty business of keeping the system in power, had fully internalized this principle and expressed it with great clarity:

The highest duty for Communist ethics is to accept the necessity of acting immorally. This is the greatest sacrifice that the revolution demands of us. The conviction of the true communist is that evil transforms itself into bliss through the dialectics of historical evolution.

Especially helpful was the idea (for the Communist revolutionaries and their successors) that there is and can be a radical discontinuity

between the present and the future and that the latter will *not* be contaminated by the practices of the present; it was the denial (again as summed up by Leites) that

... the chance of attaining certain goals may be lessened by the ... protracted and large-scale use of means which are at extreme variance with them ...

... Bolshevik doctrine seems to imply that the actual or required state of affairs existing before the full realization of Communism will be reversed afterwards ... The use of means at sharp variance with the state of affairs under Communism itself will not interfere with its ultimate realization. The Party must accept as a matter of course any expedient degree of discrepancy between means and ends.

Such attachment to “ultimate realization,” that is, a pervasive future orientation, derived from Marxism. Alexander Yakovlev a close associate of Gorbachev and one of the most important voices for reform perceptively observed:

By making the illusory future more important than humanity, Marxism gave people carte blanche to use any means when it came to power ... thus placing them beyond good and evil. Positive values – kindness, conscience, love, cooperation, solidarity, justice, freedom, the rule of law – were unfit, useless. They weakened the class struggle.

Yakovlev, unlike those who absolve Marx of any responsibility for the outrages committed in his name, notes that Marxism grew into “. . . the conviction that everything that corresponded to the interests of revolution and Communism was moral. That is the morality with which hostages were executed, the peasantry was destroyed, concentration camps were built and entire peoples were forcibly relocated.” Dedication to the best interests of abstractions such as “mankind” or “humanity” at the expense of real human beings played a similar role. Again, Yakovlev (among many others) was well aware of this fateful dichotomy: “Dostoyevky’s Grand Inquisitor speaks of love for humanity. But complete contempt for an actual individual flows from this love.”

Generations of Soviet Party functionaries, and before them revolutionaries, internalized the myth of the Party which allowed them to divest it of all responsibility for the errors and horrors committed on its behalf,

in its name. By the same token, the myth of the Party also relieved of responsibility those executing its presumed will. This included the early generation of highly-educated idealists, revolutionaries, as for instance Lev Kamenev, who characteristically “shared the near mystical belief that the Party was the sole embodiment of correct thinking. And . . . [shared] the desire to root out any thinking held to be incorrect.” Eventually he too perished, a victim of one of the show trials. For them there was “no possibility of salvation outside the faith” as Adam Hochschild wrote, following an interpretation originally put forward by Arthur Koestler in *Darkness at Noon*. Even so it remains

One of the great psychological puzzles . . . why so many intelligent, educated Communist Party members . . . looked into the abyss, saw the arrests, the midnight executions, the suppression of all dissent . . . recalled the reign of the guillotine that had followed the French revolution, vainly spoke out in protest – and then came back loyally to the Party fold.

Ideological convictions (or some primitive variant of them) were also helpful in later times, as the remarks of Dimitri Tokaryev, the commander of the murder squad at the Katyn Forest (where 15,000 Polish officers were killed on Stalin’s orders, indicate. David Pryce-Jones related that Tokaryev justified his actions “on the grounds that these Poles were class enemies . . . ‘I am proud of the work that I did in defense of our revolution.’ . . .” Several decades later, “Judge Zubiets . . . had sentenced the dissident Irena Ratushinskaya to prison for her poetry and religious faith. ‘Times were different then . . . [he said] I did my duty.’”

Of the more recent (or perhaps middle) generation of functionaries Pavel Sudoplatov, a former high-ranking KGB official wrote in a similar spirit: “We must recall . . . the mentality of idealistic Communists in the later forties and early fifties . . . Party business was sacred . . .” Vladimir Farkas, who used to be a high-ranking officer in the Hungarian political police, recalled the part played by the idea of the Party in betrayals which would otherwise have been difficult to justify:

I first observed in the case of my father [minister of defense and member of the “troika” of four running the country] and Janos Kadar [head of the Party for almost three decades] the capability of abandoning former comrades-in-arms, their mistreatment and the hideous point of view – which may be compared to that prevailing during the Spanish Inquisition – that whatever they said was the word of the Party, and the truth of the Party, because the Party is never mistaken.

Loyalty to the Party or the Cause is less helpful for understanding the motives of the generation of post-Stalin, post-Khrushchev leaders and functionaries who were neither participants in a revolution nor highly idealistic pioneers of radical social change which followed it. It is more likely that what for the early generation of revolutionary leaders was legitimation by idealistic belief became for their successors a way of habitual thinking (or non-thinking), as far as the Party's power to legitimate expedient but amoral policies was concerned. Nonetheless it is probably safe to say that each generation of leaders and specialists (and their underlings) took it for granted that their goals were sublime enough to sanitize – from the long-range historical perspective – the means used to attain them; each subscribed to Lenin's belief that "our morality is completely subordinated to the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat" and that "everything that is done in the proletarian cause is honest." There was of course a great latitude in deciding what were the interests of the proletariat and even in defining who precisely belonged to it. But there was no doubt that the Party and its leaders were the ultimate arbiters of these choices and decisions.

In the final analysis it is probably most fruitful to combine two approaches to account for the attitudes and behavior of the people whom I called the specialists in coercion. In the first, the emphasis is on idealistic commitment, in the second, on its seeming opposite: the love of power, the flaws of character, even human depravity. It is difficult to separate these two, since the lofty ideals were the most compelling justification for holding on to, or maximizing power by any means available, and for crushing mercilessly those who would challenge it.

In support of the first approach one may argue that the specialists were more deeply committed to the system and its values than those in other realms of the hierarchy whose tasks and roles required a lesser degree of ruthlessness. High-ranking officials in charge of the political police were directly confronted with the potential dilemma of ends and means; they had to use the most distasteful means; they needed particularly strong convictions and defenses to assure themselves that what they did was essential and justified by some higher purpose or morality. Even the Nazis were aware of this need and occasionally faced up to the task of explicitly justifying the mass murder of civilians, as in the notorious speech Himmler gave to SS leaders in which he acknowledged that the mass killing of civilians was not an easy task and required overcoming "human weakness."

The most satisfactory way to assuage incipient guilt or disgust was for the specialists to remind themselves of the long-range goals and benefits for which they were striving and the ideals enshrined in the theory which guided them. The struggle for the new world required painful sacrifices.

Lenin warned that "... there are no ... serious battles without field hospitals near the battlefields. It is altogether unforgivable to permit oneself to be frightened or unnerved by 'field hospital' scenes. If you are afraid of the wolves, don't go into the forest."

There was also the time-honored recourse to the claim of collective self-defense, as articulated by Molotov, who even in the 1980s insisted that the Purges were necessary, defensive and to the good of society. Soviet authorities always justified the various campaigns of coercion and political violence as strictly defensive measures, essential for the survival of the system under attack by internal and external enemies of exceptional cunning and evil. For instance, Vladimir Farkas recalled a high-ranking Soviet political police officer who illustrated the cunning of "the enemy" (the almost mythical entity and counterpoint to the Party) with a story about a group of unmasked anti-Communist spies who, when in front of the firing squad, cheered Stalin and the Soviet Union: "They did so ... in order to sow confusion even at the last moment of their lives, in the minds and hearts of the soldiers executing them, by suggesting that they were going to shoot loyal Communists."

More recently, vague references to "the times," as in the case of Yegor Ligachev discussing particular mass murders of the NKVD in the 1930s, have served a similar purpose. Apparently during certain periods, seen as prolonged emergencies, a "temporary" suspension of ethical standards had to be accepted. Anatoli Sudoplatov (who used to be in charge of assassinations abroad, among other things) also believed that the historical context provided absolution: "... I do not intend to justify what I did as a member of foreign intelligence service from the 1920s to the early 1950s. That was a different time, a different historical period." This was also the view of Ramón Mercader, the actual assassin of Trotsky who wielded the pickaxe (and whom Sudoplatov employed in this task). According to Sudoplatov, Mercader thought of himself as

... a professional revolutionary, proud of his role ... He told me: 'If I were to relive the 1940s I would do the same thing, but not in the present day world [of 1969]. He did not repent his murder of Trotsky. He quoted the Russian saying 'One does not choose the time to live and die' and said 'I would add to that. One does not choose the time to live, die or kill.' It is clear to me now that present morals are incompatible with the cruelty of the revolution, civil war and power struggles that follow them ... There was no way for Stalin to treat Trotsky in exile as merely a writer of philosophical books; Trotsky was an active enemy who had to be destroyed.

Those involved in the planning and execution of political violence in Communist Hungary, and especially the notorious Hungarian purge trial of Laszlo Rajk, clung to similar rationalizations. Mihaly Farkas, intimately involved in the Rajk case, said in 1957: "We acted in the best conviction that we fought the enemy." Mathias Rakosi, the head of the Hungarian Communist Party who used to be called, and with good reason, "the most outstanding Hungarian disciple of Comrade Stalin" in retrospect had this to say: ". . . in the Rajk affair the Hungarian leadership too must bear responsibility. Nonetheless it must be taken into account that all that happened in 1949. The international situation must be considered; these matters have to be examined not from the perspective of abstract moral principles." At the time of Rajk's arrest Rakosi offered the Hungarian Politburo the following explanation:

"When there is trouble, it is always connected to the machinations of the enemy. We are not worried about suspecting everybody alive. The growth of suspiciousness that is going to occur, is all right. When you cut trees, the chips will fall." Rakosi also related that when he was in jail there was a man who had tuberculosis of the bone, his whole foot had to be amputated. He implored the doctors to cut only a small part. 'He was operated on four times, and four times the tuberculosis remained in the bones. His whole leg had to be amputated [in the end] but he died. Had he allowed to have his whole foot amputated early on, his life could have been saved.'

It may be noted here that those advising, encouraging or ordering political violence often thrive on organic or surgical metaphors; the body politic is equated with the human body.

The second approach to understanding the actions and attitudes of the specialists relies more heavily on the attractions of power. In addition to ideologically inspired certainties and rationalizations, the likes of Beria, Yagoda, Yezhov, Sudoplatov, the Hungarian Gabor Peter and others were in all probability attracted to these positions and activities because of an overdeveloped need for power and a pleasure in its most obvious exercises. This is a disposition different from pure sadism, from the pleasure of inflicting pain. On the other hand, there is a continuity between the sense of power that comes from the ability to plan and order the imprisonment or extermination of large groups of people and the sense of power of the torturer-interrogator who can do whatever he wishes to a particular victim short of killing.

Many people who end up in positions of arbitrary, great power (but who do not have to dirty their hands) gravitate to these positions because

they permit the ruthless exercise of power – the infliction of suffering and death *from a distance*, that can also be enjoyable. Andrei Gromyko recalled that Mikhail Kaganovich (a close associate of Stalin) wrote “‘Hooray!’ on the margin of the NKVD lists of names of those sentenced to death as ‘enemies of the people.’” On the other hand physical force can be justified as a necessity. Rakosi said in connection with the beating, the defendants in the Rajk case: “Beating is a necessary method of the AVH and it needs to be used.” Gyula Princz, one of the officers actually administering the beatings, said: “‘We beat them as long as they refused to confess.’ They were beaten because ‘even during the investigation they continued their hostile activities’, that is, they denied the charges. Some had to eat salt, others had to lick the toilet bowl or had water dripped on their head.” Farkas instructed Princz to beat Rajk until he admitted being an agent of the imperialist powers. Gabor Peter, head of the AVH demanded that the interrogators show “unwavering hatred” to “the enemies of the Party,” that is, the accused in the Rajk case.

Eyewitness accounts of Soviet Party purge (or criticism and self-criticism) meetings (where a certain amount of spontaneous audience participation was encouraged), the Cultural Revolution in China, and the Cambodian criticism-self-criticism sessions, among others suggest that these regimes were often also successful in tapping into aggression and scapegoating impulses among people not professionally involved with political violence and coercion. Actively responding to such inclinations and impulses, following official encouragement, is distinct from being obedient to authority. At the same time we must remember that most of the political violence under communist systems (as under Nazism) was quite unspontaneous; it would be difficult to argue that the specialists of the KGB (and similar organizations in other communist states) were “carried away” either by their own impulses or spontaneous group encouragement. This still leaves us with the possibility, indeed probability, that many of those most intimately involved with ordering and inflicting violence found it a congenial rather than a painful exercise of duty.

JOSÉ DONOSO

1924-1996

Literature Between Past and Present: An Exchange

LÉ DEBAT: The interest of a debate between you two lies in exploring what divides you at the heart of your common love for literature. Marc Fumaroli, you are an historian of rhetoric and classical literature. Philippe Sollers, you represent a movement in contemporary literature which has long been called “avant-garde.” You, Marc Fumaroli, hold a pessimistic view of the current state of literature, marked by the exhaustion of its creative force. You serve, Philippe Sollers, as a defender and practitioner of this contemporary literature. This is the first point on which we would like to learn exactly what your contrasting judgments are.

MARC FUMAROLI: Let’s begin by agreeing on the definition of the term “literature.” If we go back in time, its meaning is rather wide. In this traditional sense, literature is not the counterpart of “science” but of ignorance. It included many genres: history as written by Voltaire or Michelet; the memoirs of Saint-Simon as well as those of Chateaubriand; the eloquence of Bossuet or Lacordaire; the poetry of Lafontaine or Hugo, of Toulet or Claudel; and drama, all types of drama. But it is also the essay: the philosophic or moral essays of Montaigne or Constant; the literary criticism of Sainte-Beuve or Bourget; the art criticism of Diderot or Fromentin; even the great erudition of an Henri Brémond or a Paul Hazard. Descartes and Claude Bernard, Buffon and Henri Poincaré, whom we would today classify as scientists, all have their appointed place in French literature. Literature was ultimately the point of convergence of the most diverse orientations of the spirit, an extended written conversation which found, most notably in Paris, a social milieu of “honest folk” to serve as its oxygen. The lycée of the Third Republic, with its emphasis on letters, successfully sought to renew this milieu by admitting the best sons and daughters of families of modest means. And yet, Sartre and Barthes attacked this same conversational milieu, which was both nour-

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ished by literature and itself a nurturer of literature, denouncing and insulting it as “bourgeois.”

If you admit, as I do, that this literature continues to have a natural place in a country like ours, which has been literary for centuries, it is difficult not to feel that the literary realm has shrunk considerably. This is very serious for the health of the spirit and the nation – even if it does not play a role in the agendas of our various political parties. Vico called literature “humanity’s jurisprudence.” What he meant is that humanity is not an object for scientific study as matter is, but has experiences that extend through time. Only literary forms resistant to the passage of time can record precedents that illuminate our immediate experience, by comparing and contrasting it to the extreme diversity of past experiences. The fact that France has developed this “jurisprudence of humanity” in its own language since the sixteenth century – with highs and lows, but in a sustained fashion – plays a significant part in the prestige it enjoys today.

I hesitate to cast a shadow over the optimism of book fairs, and I also recognize that literature in France retains both its value as a brand name and a measure of distinction. Given our circumstances, we still have a surprising variety of writers of great quality. But when one returns from a long voyage back in literary time as I have, it is tempting to believe that we have entered a new world which coldly plans to do without literature, yet pays it noisy and formal homage all the same.

When did the diminution of French literature begin? Certainly not before 1940. My own reading in the classics includes works published up until that time. Like all of us, I was raised on Proust who, among others, gave me a taste for ranging far and wide in literary time. To understand Joyce, I discovered Vico. We were already in the “Glorious Thirties” when I read Celine, and his early novels helped me gain some distance from that era and to recognize its spiritual atrophy, even though they had been written well before the war. Reading the *Nouvelle Revue Française* anthology of the years 1908 to 1940, edited by Pierre Hebey, is enough to understand that the literary arts in France until 1940 were, from a mainstream perspective, well in the center of the spirit of the time.

In my view, the star of French literature began to pale even as Sartre and Aragon seemed to make it shine brighter than ever upon the world. These two rivals subordinated literature to ideology, and thus imperceptibly moved it from the center to the margins. A short time later, a new generation of this school appeared, and new disciplines emerged, noisily taking center stage. They announced that so-called modern linguistics, semiology, psychoanalysis, anthropology, and sociology were more scientific than poor literature. And to prove their claim they spread an insufferably fashionable jargon that suddenly outdated all preceding liter-

ature and those who taught it. The two breviaries, Sartre's *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* and Barthes's *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*, take a very superior view of earlier literature, seeing it as an accomplice of alienation, as bourgeois. But what remains of literature once it has been deprived of its role as "humanity's jurisprudence," cut off from its past with even the continuity of its language disrupted? I will leave it to Philippe Sollers to bear witness to this period which he knew from the inside, while I looked on from a distance with a sense of loss.

Now the ideologies have lost ground. The humanities have lost much of their vanity, and I've been pleased to see an author of Philippe Sollers's stature become a writer once again, reclaiming the classics rather than invoking Chomsky. And yet, astonishingly, far from regaining its central and vital role, literature finds itself defenseless before what others call "the age of emptiness": the utter victory of consumer society, its vast surfaces and high-tech spectacles.

In truth, what I call the ideological period of our postwar literature cruelly weakened its immune system against dangers that were already evident. Literature let itself be devoured by film and advertisement. It lost entire aspects that were once part of its living and eloquent being: the joy of expression, the art of persuading both the spirit and the heart, the art of narrative, description, characters – everything, in short, that made it an ancient yet perennially youthful, multifaceted, magical mirror reflecting the human world. Our postwar literature even let itself be robbed of the common imaginative fund that writers of all genres could happily share with ordinary readers: the myths, the dreams, the universals of the imaginary which Vico discusses.

Must we invoke the second law of thermodynamics and apply it to literary language in France? The energy has dissipated in heat; extension (the number of books published) has conquered comprehension. But this would be giving in to fatalism or searching for an alibi. Unfortunate circumstances sometimes hide opportunities. It seems to me that literature has suffered as much from internal blows as from the external threats of scale and the mass market. Literature has suffered from its belief that by outrageously modernizing its own techniques, it would fare better amidst the decor of technical modernity. And heavy traces from the ideological period remain in the teaching of literature, with its jargon and presumption of being scientific. The fundamental recovery of literature must begin in the schools.

PHILIPPE SOLLERS: Let's return to the end of the nineteenth century. Wasn't there a similar sense of emptiness, of exhaustion? When we realize that it was not until 1912 that Claudel wrote about Rimbaud, whose *Illuminations* had created a stir in 1886 and converted Claudel, and that

Claudel's text would have an effect only in the postwar era, we can measure the time it took for the new, recentered classicism, initiated in complete obscurity by Mallarmé, to take full effect. Claudel, even in the midst of his conversion to Catholicism and the only one, in his own eyes, to create great poetry, always speaks as a member of Mallarmé's Tuesday meetings. How many at that time understood Mallarmé's message, strange and limited as it is? Only a tiny elite: Gide, Valéry, Claudel. "A throw of the dice will never abolish chance." That is not exactly one of the age's ideological facets. But ideology is always present. The religious conflicts of the eighteenth century, which inspired a very particular literature, are ideological conflicts.

MF: You want a definition of history. I would like a definition of ideology.

PS: Let's call it a propagandistic discourse used in the service of a particular belief or philosophy.

MF: You're confusing rhetoric and ideology.

PS: There is always ideology when the discourse entails an immediate stake in power.

MF: That's too wide a definition to be of much use. By ideology, I mean the projection of scientific rationality, invented by Descartes to understand matter, onto different orders of the human spirit. It is the modern phenomenon *par excellence*. Aristotle and all those centuries that accepted rationality as master were aware of the distinction between scientific truth and the truth of human appearances. Plato, according to another ontological division, authorized the same distinction. Malebranche is the first French ideologue who, dismissing Descartes' prudence, applied the Cartesian method to morality and theology.

PS: But this or that series of pamphlets provoked by the Jansenist question is ideology. Even *Les Provinciales* is ideological.

MF: Not at all! That's literature, and some of the best of it is found in the genre of the pamphlet or the polemical essay. The ideas that Pascal defends are less important than the art with which he persuades his reader and throws off his adversaries. It is an art made of a style that reinvents French prose.

PS: Calling it great literature does not make it incompatible with belonging to ideology.

MF: On that we are in profound disagreement. You are in fact placing *Les Provinciales* on the same level as *L'Impérialisme: stade suprême du capitalisme*.

The notion of a stake in power, much loved by an entire school of sociology, dissolves the boundary between literature (the daughter of rhetoric) and ideology. In my view, ideology arises from an abusive credibility that invokes scientific rationality and applies it where it doesn't belong. In this scenario, reason may be the worst enemy of Pascal's "intuitive mind." In *Les Provinciales*, he does not join the categorical theologians. He is elegant enough to discuss theological questions in the order and according to the shades of the credible. He takes as arbiter the common sense of "honest folk." This is the source of his triumph which today still illuminates Port Royal. In politics and history – areas that depend entirely on credibility – Lenin and his kind cut themselves off entirely from the scientists and set loose a reign of terror.

PS: What you're defining is the modern form of ideology, which I feel should be seen as much more comprehensive.

But let me get back to Mallarmé and his Tuesday audiences. They were all deeply influenced by what they perceived as essential in the new property of condensation which Mallarmé applies to language. But it would be quite a while before this sense of rupture brought about something resembling a new classicism – which is exactly what *La Nouvelle Revue Française* was. There we are then, at the end of the nineteenth century, in a kind of parenthetical state of expectation. French literature will enjoy a reflowering twenty, thirty, forty years later thanks to several widely unknown seeds: along with Rimbaud and Mallarmé, consider Lautréamont and the rhetorical force of the *Chants de Maldoror* and his *Poésies*, which becomes apparent only with the Surrealists and, even then, is usually misunderstood. I find this rupture more striking than the idealized continuity which you believe you see there. In the late 1800s, society was in a state of complete exhaustion and literary decadence much like the one you diagnose today. History has known such uneventful periods.

Like you, I believe that the period leading up to World War II, on the other hand, is marked by a forceful literary presence in all areas. You mentioned Céline. Look at what is taking place now. What Céline wrote after World War II is just barely reaching us today. Like it or not, everyone realizes that his work constitutes a major monument for the French language, its resources and dimensions. In his work one finds, highly refined, Villon as well as Saint-Simon. Céline is considered an exploder of language, writing in a constant scream. Open the magnificent edition of the fourth *Pléiade* volume edited by Henri Godard, and you will be struck by the number of references to rhetoric and the classics. For example, in the middle of a long digression on the fact that nature is shit, that our organs devour our lives, that we permanently suffer from cancer, amidst this long

and admirable tirade fed by his medical experience, I came across this phrase: "You, fertile in black artifices!" There's a textual note stating that "fertile in black artifices" is taken directly from Saint-Simon, in his portrait of a duchess. Céline takes up the phrase and integrates it perfectly into the flow of his style. This is just to point out that literature has a subterranean history that should not be underestimated. A completely disruptive modern writer lives by revitalizing the classics. In Proust we find: "That is modern which is called on to become classic." People don't want to understand right away that Baudelaire is one with Racine; so there is an uproar. There is a certain reticence in society when it comes to recognizing that the same thing resurfaces in very different forms, that history is not a succession of eras, but a single proximity to the same. . . .

MF: La Bruyère wrote: "Everything has been said, and we come too late in the more than seven thousand years that man has existed and thought." These are the first words of his *Caractères* and are themselves an extremely new variation, applied to a thoroughly modern society, on the Characters of Theophrastes from the fourth century B.C.

PS: Yes, but no one ever says enough. Allow me to quote Ducasse in his *Poésies*: "Nothing is said. We come too early in the more than seven thousand years that man has existed. We have the advantage of working after the ancients, the most gifted of the moderns." There's a good example, admirably rhetorical, giving the classics new life by using or subverting them (in this case La Bruyère). Literature's real continuity is also present, in this subterranean history that communicates in a strange way, in breaks or fissures, with apparent or official versions of history. It is there to be read and never completely reaches us. *Finnegans Wake* will always remain enigmatic. In these works by Proust, Kafka, Joyce, Céline, I find a paradoxical proof of the continuity of literature's great vitality.

I agree with you, on the other hand, in your characterization of our present era. I don't know of any better words to define it than Heidegger's: "the rise of the technical and its world-wide reign." We must ask what effect our society will have on the diversified language of literature. In this scenario, the death of literature is in fact preprogrammed, as is the death of man as you have defined him. In 1951, Heidegger made some astonishing statements in *Overcoming Metaphysics*, if you consider how very few biological experiments had been done up to that time: "Literary engineering in the cultural sector will correspond more and more to engineering in matters of conception." What disappears, what tends to be stifled *in utero*, if I may, by the conjunction of technical sovereignty and market forces is the depth of literary language as we understand it. A novel that does not sell in three months has very little chance of being reissued

later. The potentially creative individual is increasingly discouraged from taking part in these upheavals, these adventures with language. You can see it in the incredible loss of our ability to read.

That is the reason why I would like to join the general notion of *literature* with that of reading. I return to Claudel: "The purpose of literature is to teach us to read." You see how useful this definition could be in getting us out of such pointless debates as: What can literature do? What should it do? Which ideology should it serve? Ideologies eventually become totalitarian, as our century gives incomparable proof. . . .

LE DÉBAT: You have in common your interest in the classics. This has been Marc Fumaroli's calling, and he has devoted himself to the life of an historian. Following his baroque period, Philippe Sollers's calling, as critic for *Le Monde*, has been to devote himself first and foremost to the classics. And yet, at the same time, you approach the classics very differently. Marc Fumaroli proceeds from an historical asceticism and attempts to recapture their original meaning, while Philippe Sollers is more concerned with bringing these same works in proximity to us. Would you agree with this description?

MF: Our divergences seem to me not only self-evident but necessary. I have never attempted, nor even wished, to fashion myself as a writer, much less a novelist. What I write belongs to another literary genre, but it is literature all the same. My genre, which has its own classics, is the erudite knowledge of literary tradition, particularly the French. It's a sort of literary asceticism very different from the writer's. It has a completely different relation to memory, the imagination, and style. It requires a certain self-forgetting to resuscitate, from a rather rigorous point of view, seemingly lost moments in the literary tradition and the forgotten meaning and significance of works from the recent or distant past. I have occasionally had the pleasure of seeing that writers, novelists, and poets could find the kind of sojourns that I've published useful or enriching. There is, in fact, something profoundly romantic in this literary erudition. It has some affinity with the writer's possibly even more romantic and improbable work. But a writer of your sort is also an egotist. He wants to be one with his style, and he brings everything he perceives to his work: the classics, his learning, his personal life, current events. It is another family of literature. "My Father's mansion has many rooms." . . .

LE DÉBAT: Philippe Sollers, twenty years ago, would you have used the same language?

PS: I'm often seen as a repentant terrorist: "So, you've discovered Bossuet, Voltaire, etc." But of course, I am discovering them much less than is sup-

posed. I approve of Marc Fumaroli's way of speaking about intense meditation on texts. There is no literature without this activity in the deepest silence. But I also lean towards involving myself in the *polemos*. At certain times, literature follows its path through a number of wars – wars that are not always just and require multiple engagements, in every sense of the word. Here we find the rhetoric important to Marc Fumaroli. I have the feeling, in this respect, that I'm not bad at rhetoric, using very different forms with ease. This draws the reproaches of an age that wants to name and classify, that wants to fix one in set images, in permanent groupings. It is true that I've written in very diverse styles, that I have engaged in various polemics, even excesses of political language whose irony was not understood – too bad. My intention has always been to deflate the vulgar Marxism whose reign I tried to break by overheating it. . . .

MF: Now you're searching through tradition for a mirror to reflect the modern that you are. I'm not complaining. You're making yourself out to be a rhetorician in retrospect – which, in fact, has always been a virtue for a writer. Nonetheless, previously you wanted to be an ideologue of language. What I recall most clearly from that time is your role as the promoter of all that could destroy the very literature you now claim is under siege and are defending. In *Tel quel*, I read articles in which you claimed to be subverting an oppressive society by undermining its language. That's a strange way of saving the Word. Today language has in fact been undermined, as you had wished, but the Word hasn't fared much better. You worked long and hard to invade it with a series of social sciences that pretended, in effect, to take its place. It came to a point when the academic public, now extremely large and very susceptible to conceptual games that do not require a great deal of discipline, provided ideologues with a much more resonant sounding board than the traditional audience of the "honest folk," themselves intimidated and disoriented, could offer real writers. I couldn't help but observe then that this strategy's first and most evident consequence was the weakening of a French literature that is now, with you, trying to save itself from the steamroller of mass-market books and entertainment.

PS: You are ascribing considerable powers to me.

MF: I'm not ascribing. You had them.

PS: The power of a tri-quarterly journal? Let's be serious! Where do you see a demolition project in this ideologization you deplore – in its intentions? My view is that it was a matter of providing an impetus, as the result has proven. You have to remember the world we were living in before 1968. Is it not true that after World War II, an attenuated Marxism

increasingly dominated this country? It had a prestigious name, a real adversary in the most noble sense of the word, a philosopher who knew that literature could be played for high stakes: Sartre. Sartre was involved in all areas, including the literary. From a certain perspective he was a Flaubert, from another a Mallarmé or a Baudelaire. It's not by chance that Sartre intervened at these precise points, with these authors who had been so important at the end of the nineteenth century. On the other hand there was a flood of realisms – socialist or not – that is, a flood of amorphous literature meant to “reflect.” It was, remember, an argument of the time. It was almost scandalous to point out that literature was made from language – it won't be long before we have to start that again. At the moment we are surrounded by ideology. The term “ideology” should not be reserved for the supposedly triumphant structuralism. Literature was already mid-crisis before those criminals named Barthes, Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, and so on appeared. This destruction is related to the compromising, in the drama of World War II, of literary elite with this or that totalitarian capital – whether Berlin or Moscow.

So there was this movement in which I fully participated and do not now renounce. We did oppose this powerful dominant ideology rather severely, if not as terrorists, and recalled some elementary things, to wit that literature is not made primarily of ideas or descriptions, but, first and foremost, of words.

LÉ DEBAT: You cannot deny that these assertions were themselves directly connected with the dominant Marxism.

PS: It later became an ideology that invaded the university.

LE DÉBAT: A political ideology. Mao Tse Tung does not lend himself well as Mallarmé's natural counterpart.

MF: And the Cultural Revolution? There has rarely been anything as horrible in man's history.

PS: Precisely because the linking of Mallarmé and Mao was so little evident, we are still talking about it.

MF: Speaking of Mallarmé, since he has been mentioned a second time, let me point out something that is not without relevance to these disasters. The “Renaissance” of 1910–1912 which gave French letters such momentum until 1940 came about against, rather than with, Mallarmé. Fortunately Mallarmé was a challenge, not a program. In Claudel, in Valéry, in the first issue of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, there is a richness, a reappropriation of tradition that Mallarmé's gnosticism would not allow. French literature knew how to be modern without being modernist. The same goes for

French painting between 1909 and 1940. It is the modernism you heralded that rediscovered in Blanchot the nihilistic abstraction of the word, the absent and blank “écriture” that could invoke Mallarmé.

PS: There also have been intense moments of negativity. The question is, towards what will this negative turn? As a matter of fact, almost all of Mallarmé’s followers turned away from him. The “Igitur catastrophe,” as Claudel would say, did not prevent Proust from embarking on his long narrative. In this case, the rise of such a negative, that would serve as a vaccine for those who came later, was inevitable.

MF: The ideological short-circuit between Mallarméan negativity and the totalitarian inhumanity of Stalin, Mao, or Hitler, in which many saw strokes of genius rather than the blink of an eye, partly extinguished the light of French literature. Yves Bonnefoy, Mallarmé’s most authentic heir, did not take part in these extravagances. Despite its nocturnal and negative side, Bonnefoy’s poetry attempts to save what he calls the “presence,” that is, the being or even the divine nature to be shared.

PS: In order to understand, we must remember how strong the French Communist Party’s presence was in those years. At that time, the strategy was to defend everything the enemy attacked and to attack everything he defended. The danger in such a case is to be contradictory, to mix everything up and destroy our few surviving areas of civilization. That’s the risk of the negative. . . . I took that risk, and I don’t regret it.

LE DÉBAT: You’re saying that you meant your defense of Maoism to be a strategic opposition to Communism?

PS: Not only Communism, but the inherently Communist society that went with it. I will add something that is at this point relevant to Heideggerean historicity: China’s appearance on the world scene.

MF: Even retrospectively, what you are saying is astonishingly confused. China’s grandeur is its very long literary tradition – which may be the longest in the world. This tradition was literally shattered during the Cultural Revolution – and physically shattered when the Chinese literati were pummeled and martyred by the Red Guard. Meanwhile in Paris, Godard’s *La Chinoise* and Sollers’s *Tel quel* presented the Cultural Revolution as part of the “historicity” that provided niches for Sorbonne professors. Like Simon Leys, I have no sense of humor. . . . Let me bring opposites together and point to a parallel between the Chinese tragedy and the tragedy of our national literature, already suffering from defeat and collaboration, but especially harmed by the stupefying intellectual fiddling performed by its most brilliant and noisy talents.

LE DÉBAT: Before fighting Communism with Maoism, you had an extended flirtation with the French Communist Party, if I'm not mistaken.

PS: Absolutely, even if "flirtation" is not the appropriate word. The idea, which turned out to be mistaken, was to use the channels of influence in the university and elsewhere in service of what we felt was essential, which had nothing to do with the politics in question. There was a certain cynicism in this plan, I admit, and I can be faulted for that. It was a way of using the available channels.

LE DÉBAT: A great marketing success!

PS: There were no natural allies to be found in French universities before 1968. French society has changed a lot since then. The danger I perceive today is not the same, but it is no less the confirmation of the same global phenomenon that must be analyzed in itself: the rise of the technical. There is no contradiction for me between previous totalitarian phenomena and the contemporary, supposedly liberal market that is meant to increase literacy and reading but actually results in illiteracy and the reign of a lateral mafia. If I hadn't been involved in such a revolt back then, I think I would be much less worried by the situation today than I am.

MF: Between the first and the second Sollers, aside from the talent, there is another point of continuity which fascinates me. It's the way in which, previously in *Tel quel*, now in *Le Monde*, you brandish Sade like a banner. If Mallarmé is a sublime poet, whom his disciples followed with reservations, Sade is a feudal and obsessive writer whose works I wouldn't wish on any nation's body of literary classics. For he is certainly the most extreme point of sterility and oversatiety in the exhausted literature of the Enlightenment. To use Sade as a flag for literary reconquest is simply to extend a bit further the desert, the drought, the hysteria.

PS: I disagree with you completely. I think Sade is a great novelist, with the force of his imagination, the extraordinary construction of his books, the number of things you learn – just think of Italy in *Juliette*. It's also a great account of the Terror. What I would like to show, with my interest in the classics, is that today you can read them in relation to one another. I don't think it's irrelevant that Sade can be read at the same time as Chateaubriand, or Voltaire with Bossuet. The kind of literary history in which we've lived for a long time has two characteristics. First, it opposes two camps – a constant in French literature – Voltaire against Rousseau, Bossuet against Fénelon, Racine against Corneille, Sartre against Camus. Second, it has a system of exclusion. We build these brutally exclusive pantheons. In your desire to exclude Sade there is a certain intolerance in

the service of some pantheon.

MF: I'm not excluding him at all. I'm just relegating him to the second rung, where he is always put once one's adolescent crisis is past.

PS: I leave the responsibility for that judgment to you. I, on the other hand, put Sade on the very top rung of great French literary invention.

MF: Today you're presenting yourself as a rhetorician, not without panache. You know that the goal of art is threefold: to please, to convince, but also to move. In general your classics are on the dry side. You claim to prefer eighteenth-century authors, whose reasoned aridity and utter lack of music Sade brutally revealed. Faced with a technical world and the marketplace, the refusal or inability to move emotionally seems to me a sign of weakness.

PS: Fumaroli is an incurable Rousseauist!

LÉ DEBAT: Are we not witnessing a profound change in the intellectual paradigm, characterized by the division of philosophy and literature? Traditionally, philosophers – in the widest sense of the word – in this country were deeply interested in literary creation, which elevated literary criticism to an important position. At the same time, writers themselves were very preoccupied with their own problems. But now that alliance seems to have been disbanded: philosophers are tilling their own soil and writers are left alone with a pure, reflexive literature. What do you think of these phenomena?

PS: Your analysis is accurate. These traditional relations had become very complicitous in the sixties and seventies – which, judging by your question, you don't seem simply to condemn. This experience, to which I remain very attached, must have caused any number of fears or deep anxieties among conservatives as well as among liberals. Even today order rules the Rue d'Ulm. It's very unlikely that that sort of connivance will be repeated under the reign of the technical and its programmed servants. A new clerisy wanting as little literature and as little thought as possible will arise under this new rule. Instead of considering yourself liberated from the terrorism you feel *Tel quel* represented, consider instead that the loss of this open alliance leads to general servility.

MF: I am the first to regret that literature is no longer a body in which philosophy, history, the social and political essay, literary erudition, and the novel interact and compete, primarily through style. You will allow me not to consider the "alliance" of the years 1965 to 1975 you mention as an example of such interaction. In fact it consumed and destroyed that

ancient solidarity of genres and disciplines within one literature in France. In order for this solidarity to arise again, as it perhaps is doing now, we should rather turn our backs on that element of the sixties that so fascinated American "French departments." The guerilla alliance you find regrettable played French literature's academic audience off against its traditional audience. It did not reunite but rather divided around a jargon that had its success and its innocent converts, but it is now on the way out. We see it today. "Interdisciplinarity" or "multidisciplinarity" (horrible, Attila-the-Hun type terms) are all that remains when everything possible has been done to forget and make others forget general culture – which can only be a literary culture. Bergson can enter into a dialogue with Péguy or Proust, within the framework of literature in the widest sense of itself. What we need now in this country, rather than nostalgia for the ruling interdisciplinarity of the 1960s, is a return of literature to its own means and its natural role, which is to offer to all kinds of talents and disciplines, in its love of language, a common ground and a common public.

Translated from the French by Tess Lewis

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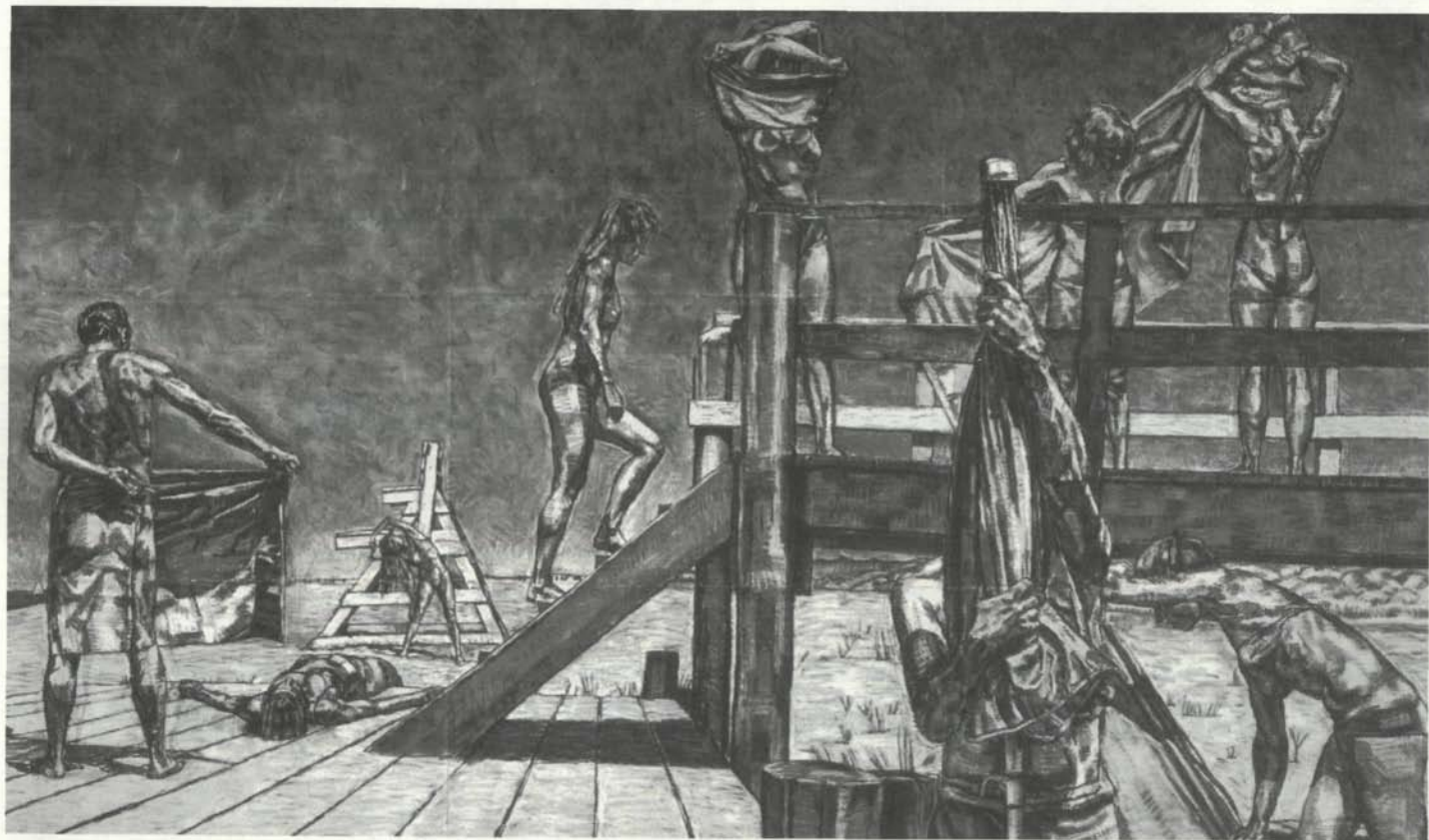
KAREN WILKIN

At the Galleries

Drawing, in both the strictest and broadest interpretations of the term, was the theme of some of this fall's most absorbing exhibitions. The most comprehensive was *Powerful Expressions*, selected for the National Academy of Design by Townsend Wolfe, director of the Arkansas Art Center, which for the past twenty-five years has collected drawings with special emphasis (and has supplied many of the exhibited works). Wolfe chose works by what he calls "fifteen of the best drawers working today," American artists who treat drawing "as significant in its own right." What interested him, he says, was the quality of the drawing, not who did it or whether it was abstract, figurative, or anything in between.

The result was an eclectic, uneven show that was never less than interesting. The works in *Powerful Expressions* varied greatly in intention, materials, scale, character, degree of finish, and, despite Wolfe's assertions, level of achievement, but they consistently bore witness to the way drawing can reflect an artist's most intimate processes and respond to his most exhaustive requirements for a complete work of art, often at the same time. If there was a unifying theme, it was the multivalent nature of drawing itself, a notion examined by Jack Flam in a catalogue essay in which he ties together Wolfe's loosely gathered threads by discussing such issues as the dual nature, "both constructive and expressive," of the movement of the draughtman's hand, and the "magical" way "diverse combinations of marks and scribbles can somehow delineate specific relationships."

Among the strongest works exhibited were Graham Nickson's immense charcoal drawings of figures dressing and undressing, towelling themselves, and generally moving purposefully against stage-set-like gardens and expanses of beach – straightforward enough until we become aware that faces are hidden or turned away, that the lovingly articulated bodies are strangely stilled, that each figure occupies a dislocated psychological space. Nickson's delicately adjusted touches begin to seem relentless. No matter how potent the illusion of bulk and space or the effect of light they evoke, the very density of the crisp, smudged strokes, together with the firm structure of the images – as geometrically clear and unyielding as a quattrocento fresco – conspire to trap the figures in the vast surface of the paper. The contradiction makes Nickson's harmonious holiday world vaguely ominous and unforgettable.



Graham Nickson, *Bridge Bathers*, 1984–1994, charcoal on paper, 95 inches x 159 inches. Courtesy of Salander-O'Reilly Galleries.

A selection of Jake Berthot's seductive, disturbing works on paper, spanning ten years, provided another highlight. (Earlier, his most recent drawings, a series of generously scaled, spare images pared to almost nothing, often surrounded by fragments of spiky, hard-to-read text, were seen at David McKee Gallery.) Berthot's images are ghostly, insubstantial: tremulous lines diagram absences. He deals, it seems, with the barely grasped, the remembered, rather than the verifiable, the observed. Yet Berthot's drawings are not only powerfully evocative but physically robust, their wispy, resonant images called up out of densely layered strokes or elegant expanses of gesso. Robert Birmelin's fractured "neo-Futurist" glimpses of crowded city streets have interested me for some years, but his rapidly scrawled conté crayon visions of how we perceive urban life have seemed to me far more successful than his paintings in their fusion of touch, means, and image. The energetic Birmelins at the Academy confirmed my view that his drawings are among his best works.

Weaknesses? Nancy Grossman's mixed media collages, in particular, and the Jasper Johnses, as a group. Grossman's uneasy amalgamations of figure and landscape seemed finicky and soft, and while they obviously deployed a wealth of virtuoso marks in a surprising number of media, they failed to read as anything but accumulations of effects. The blandness of the Johnses in *Powerful Expressions* was surprising. If nothing else, the monster retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art reaffirmed that this much-ballyhooed artist's greatest strength is as a draughtsman, but you'd never have suspected it from the works at the Academy. A happier surprise was provided by a smudgy, intense Sidney Goodman charcoal of two women awkwardly carrying a man – the best of the Goodmans exhibited – a weird image whose rigid poses, massed darks, wiped lights, and relentless frontality gave it the eerie presence of grotesquely enlarged early photographs, despite the clear evidence of the artist's hand.

The Academy's wide-ranging selection of Jacob Lawrence's works on paper was like a synopsis of the concurrent *Jacob Lawrence: Drawings 1945-1996* at D. C. Moore Gallery (later at the Arkansas Art Center). Together, the two shows assembled more than half a century's worth of seldom-seen works by this doyen of African-American painters. When Lawrence works in color, he constructs with expressively shaped and disposed flat expanses; contour and hue dominate. When he draws, he contrasts masses of black and white, linked by angular linear "pathways," to establish more ambiguous spaces and new kinds of rhythms. Lawrence's works on paper range from spare line drawings to fully chromatic paintings, and at D. C. Moore the entire spectrum was represented, from graphic ink drawings of the 1940s inspired by a Langston Hughes poem, like dazzling black and white crazy quilts flickering with arresting images, to more recent, softly

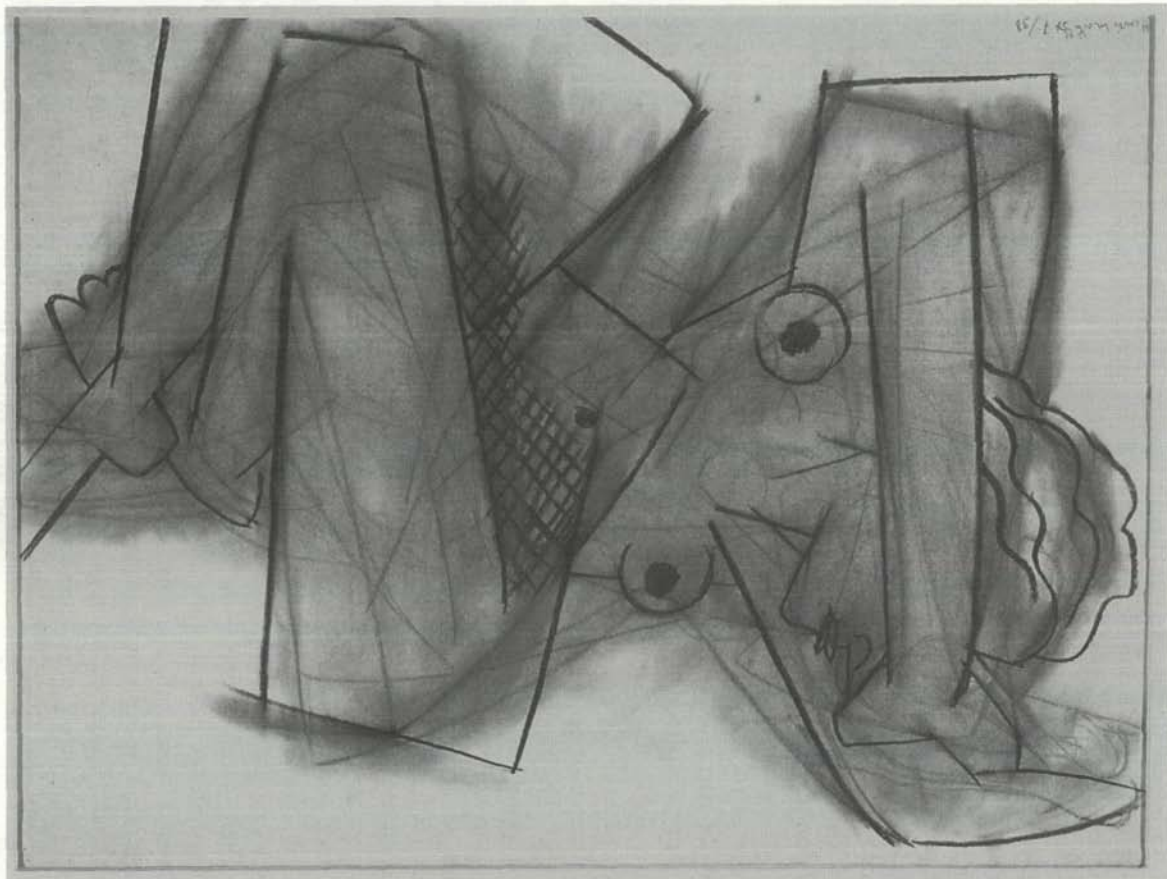


Jacob Lawrence, *Study for Painting - The Builders*, 1985, pencil and crayon on paper, 24 inches x 18 inches. Courtesy of D C Moore Gallery.

stroked planar drawings in pencil, many enriched by later additions of color. For all the individuality of Lawrence's work, whether in color or black and white, its sharp-edged, simplified forms and uninflected expanses announce his connections with an American tradition of socially conscious art – think older artists such as Ben Shahn or Robert Gwathmey, with whom Lawrence shared political and social concerns, as well as formal ones – but that is part of its charm. The syncopated rhythms of Lawrence's drawings add warmth and energy to his proletarian motifs, while in his more engagé images, stylization simply intensifies the anger and pride implicit in his African-American themes.

Among the past season's greatest pleasures was the splendidly chosen survey of Matisse's drawings at C and M Arts, from rare Fauvist images of 1906 to bold brush and ink "paintings" of the late 1940s and early 1950s. That a Matisse drawing show was full of marvelous works is not newsworthy; what was remarkable (and impressive) was the mix of first-rate near-iconic drawings and unfamiliar ones of equal or even higher quality. Witness those Fauvist drawings: *Seated Woman*, 1906, a nude rendered with a few swift strokes of a broad, ink-dipped brush, the angular arabesque of her limbs and torso contrasted with the dense zig-zag patterns of floor, wallpaper and upholstery, and *The Idol*, from the same year, a ravishing half-length standing nude in pen and ink, the fullness of her body suggested only by eloquent contours, tellingly doubled at crucial junctures, and setting suggested only by the placement of the figure. Both are fine drawings and exemplary of their period, but while *Seated Woman* is a deservedly celebrated, textbook image, *The Idol* is almost unknown.

Similarly, the exhibition's pen and ink drawings of the model in the studio presented one of Matisse's standard themes with distinctly non-standard, perfectly wonderful examples. The most spectacular was a reclining nude on a patterned couch with a mirror in the background and, at the lower right of the sheet, Matisse at work, his presence declared by his hands, gripping drawing board and pen, in the act of creating the image before us, the self-referential drawing of the drawing included. It's an extraordinary, layered image, apparently spontaneous and deeply considered, witty and grave, a paradigm not only of incisive line, inventive touch, and irreproachable placement, but of complicated issues about perception, illusion, and the relation of the artist as what Michael Fried calls "first beholder" to his work. The charcoal drawings, with their shifting, searching contours, were equally notable, from a study for the famous 1925 canvas of a straight-backed nude, folded against Persian patterns, now in the Beaubourg, to an unfamiliar 1939 drawing of a woman reading in which the masses of body, chair, and table are simultaneously invoked as dense, architectural solids and dematerialized as strokes and smudges of

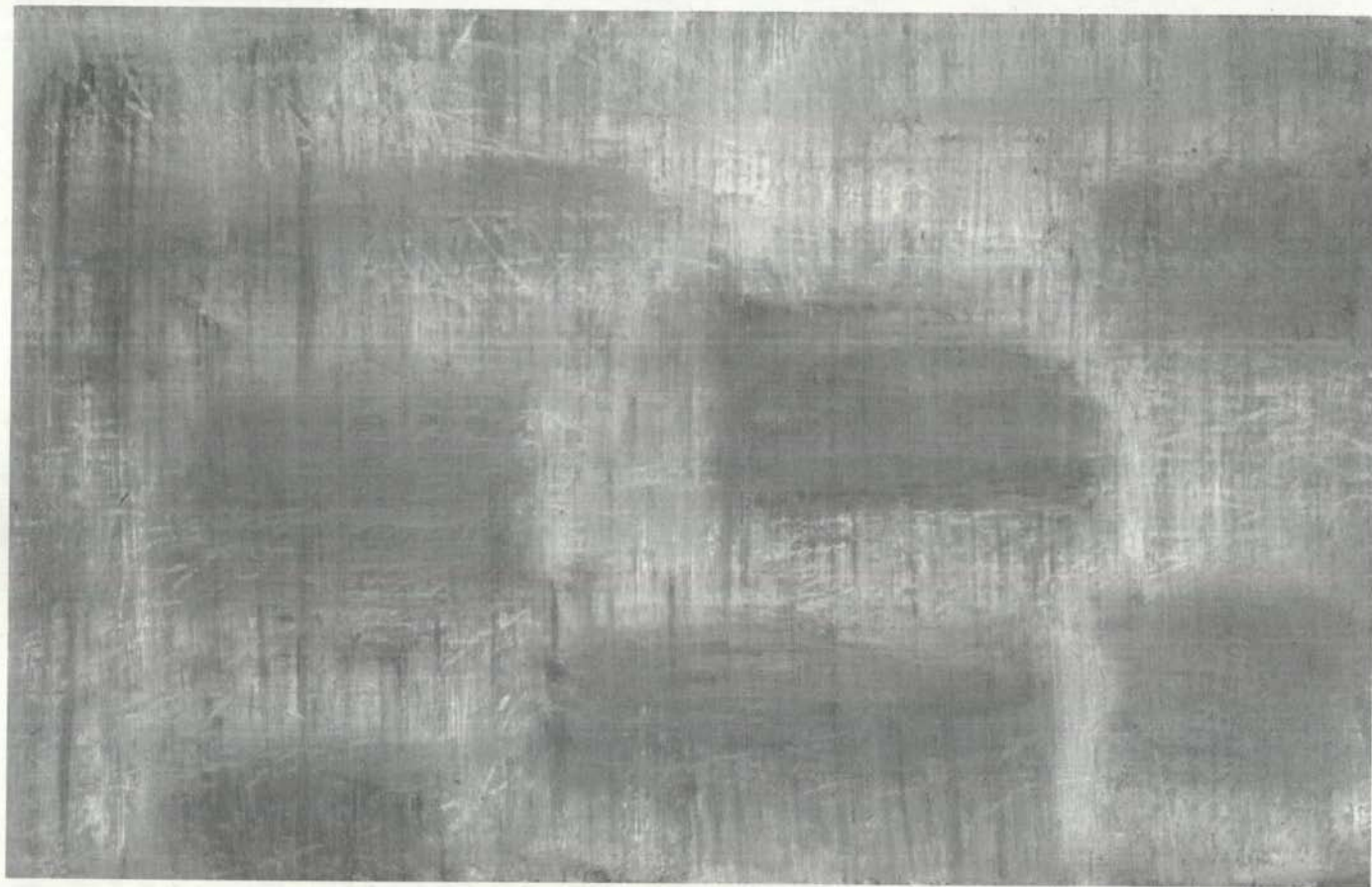


Henri Matisse, *Nude Study*, 1938, charcoal on paper, 24 inches by 31 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches. Courtesy of C & M Arts.

tone. The handsome catalogue's thoughtful essay by Jack Flam (yes, again) was an added bonus, an informative examination of the discrepancies between how Matisse's drawings have been perceived and his declared intentions in regard to this most flexible of disciplines.

Plains Indian Drawings 1865-1935. Pages from a Visual History, at The Drawing Center, organized with the American Federation of Arts, was another delight, a show of exciting work needing no justification other than its aesthetic qualities that also addressed intelligently all those uncomfortable present-day questions about clashes between cultures. (The exhibition will travel to Omaha, Milwaukee, and Pittsburgh in 1997.) The little-known exhibited works, made by Lakota, Kiowa, Arapaho, and Cheyenne men after contact with whites, represent both the continuity of an ancient tradition and its transformation, just as they chronicle both the glories of the past and its irrevocable loss. Traditionally, Plains Indians recorded their history in rock engravings, painted buffalo hides and tipis, in the form of symbolic narratives recounting important battles, acts of heroism, and confrontations with enemies. With the coming of white explorers, traders, Indian agents, the American military, and eventually, a flood of settlers, new, conveniently portable materials arrived – pen and ink, colored pencil, and watercolor on paper ranging from recycled stationery to ledgers – and were quickly adopted by the chroniclers. The bitter irony, of course, is that the drawings made in these new materials became items of trade, sought after and collected as testimonials to a vanishing way of life by the very agents of its destruction – including the soldiers sent to subdue rebellious tribes. (What did soldier-collectors make of the drawings' striking contrast between depictions of Indian warriors as fluidly mobile and individual, and the army as a repetitive abstraction, reduced to the geometric uniformity and rigid formations of military drill?) Poignant drawings record the train journey of a group of captured Plains Indians to a prison in Florida. The autobiographical drawings made by those prisoners to sell to tourists during their incarceration – a practice encouraged by a well-meaning administrator – include some of the exhibition's most glorious images of traditional Plains Indian life: mounted warriors in elaborate costumes, tribal dignitaries in brilliant blankets, courting couples, decorated tipis, buffalo hunts, and religious ceremonies. Wrenching drawings depict the realities of prison life, showing once long-haired, beplumed, mounted warriors in neat blue jackets and cropped heads, sitting docilely in the classroom.

All of this, while tragic, moving, and instructive, would be of merely anecdotal interest if the drawings themselves were not such remarkable works of art. Some are more accomplished than others, hardly surprising, given the essentially random sampling of practitioners and the span of time surveyed. The best drawings are distinguished by surprising placement,



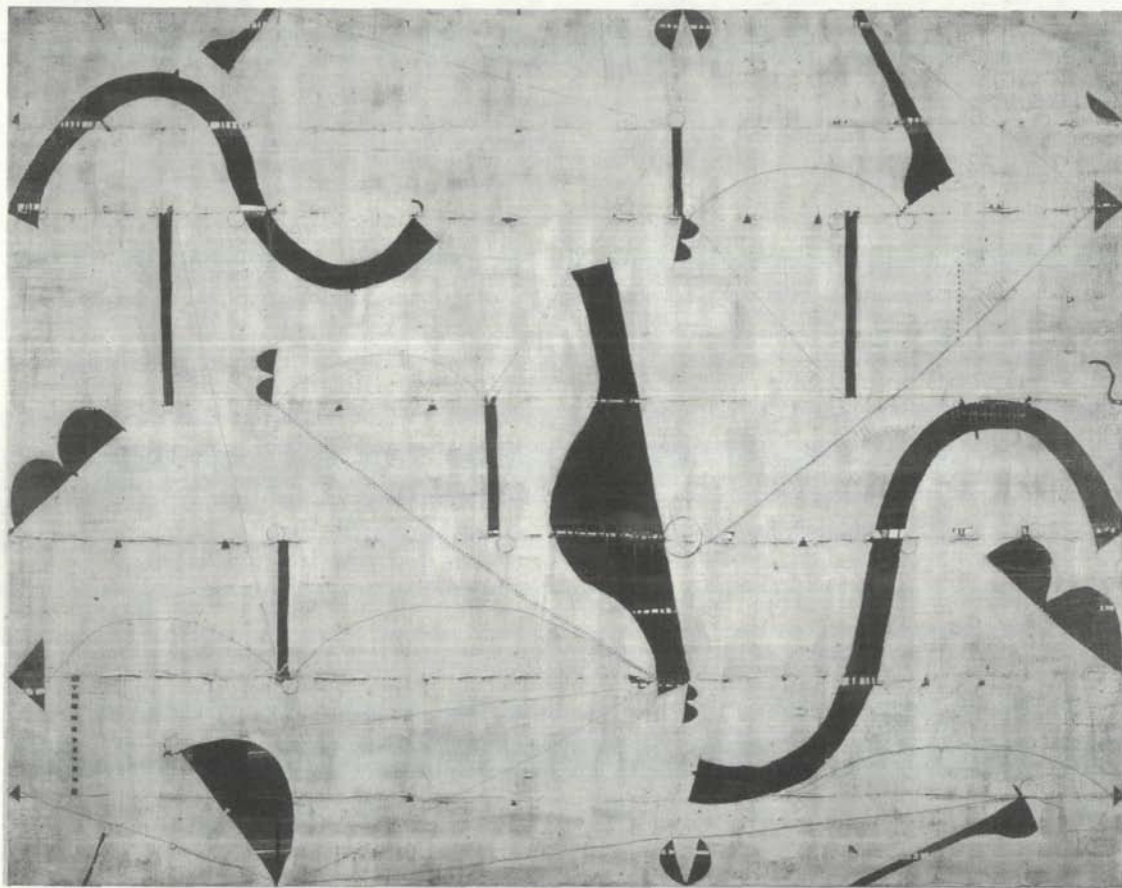
Louise Fishman, *White Clouds, Blue Mountains*, 1996, oil on linen, 70 inches x 110 inches. Courtesy of Robert Miller Gallery.

bold patterning, and lively color, within a circumscribed palette; images are oriented towards all four points of the compass, spinning dizzily, with wonderful effect, across the ledger pages. But even the crudest efforts are noteworthy for their passionate intensity, and the great majority, while quite conventionalized, have a great deal of formal power and considerable invention – for example, a rather clumsy but unignorable shorthand rendering of a circle of galloping Crow warriors as overlapping, outlined horses' heads, with the riders' profiles superimposed to conjure up agile horsemen pressed flat to their mounts' bodies.

What all the drawings share is evidence of scrupulous observation transformed into expressive shape: witness the long necks and narrow ears of a row of soldiers' mules, the powerful haunches and straining necks of speeding horses, the massed poles of tipis. An extraordinary drawing made about 1876–77, by Making Medicine, a Cheyenne prisoner, depicts “Fowls of Indian Territory,” including a bald eagle, a turkey, a magpie, a kingfisher, and four different kinds of hawks, each readily identifiable as it flies across the page. Making Medicine's *Killing an Elk* powerfully overlaps the mounted hunter and his collapsing victim, and situates them with the massed tracks of the herd and the trailing prints of prey and pursuer. The Plains Indian drawings are schematic, stylized, and sometimes expedient, but like the amazingly vivid images in prehistoric caves, they distill typical features into essentials, and achieve an eloquent balance between the particular and the abstract.

The most memorable drawings need no anthropological or historical justification. A fierce, confrontational image of a Sun Dance Lodge by Wohaw, a young Kiowa imprisoned in the mid-1870s, is as striking for its vigorous touch, strange color, dizzying shifts of scale, and variety of marks as for its hovering supernatural beings – like scrawled clouds with beaks. A mystical scene drawn in 1882 by an Arapaho known as “Henderson Ledger Artist A” – some artists, like medieval masters, are nameless, although recognizable as distinct individuals – is another knockout, a free-for-all of spots, feathers, floating bullets (maybe), and wavy lines of power exploding from one page of the ledger into a second, the whole anchored by the implacable gaze of an atypically frontal, magical Thunder Horse. As the curators, Janet Catherine Berlo and Gerald McMaster, remind us, making these images was both celebration and mourning, commemoration and act of subversion. Whatever the motivation, the best works in this wonderful show leap off the page, not only for their force of feeling, but for their freshness, vigor, and immediacy.

The context of this constellation of drawing exhibitions may explain why “drawing issues” seemed crucial to the recent work of Louise Fishman and Harriet Korman, shown at about the same time, at Robert Miller



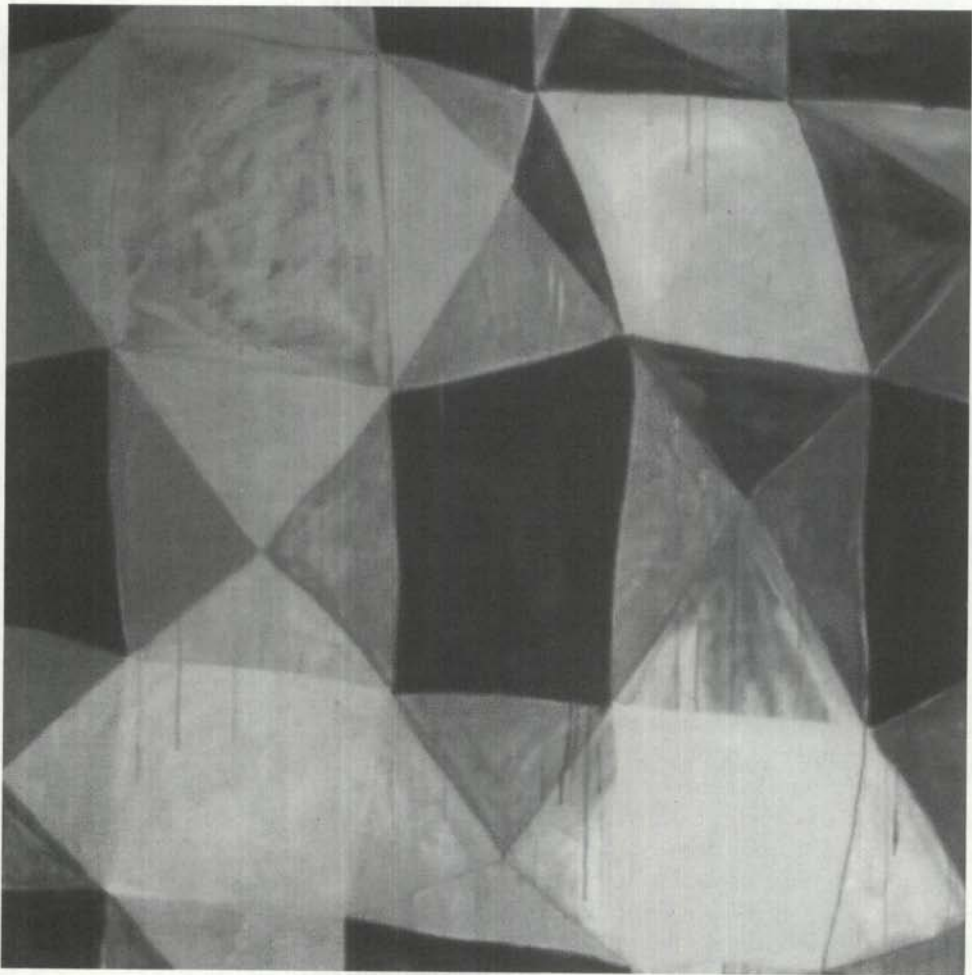
Caio Fonesca, *Pietrasanta Painting C96.31*, 1996, acrylic on canvas, 59 inches by 78 inches.
Courtesy of Knoedler and Company.

Gallery and Lennon-Weinberg, respectively. Fishman and Korman appear to share certain convictions. Both are concerned, at the moment, with near-monochrome, and both turn gesture into a main event – which is, arguably, what gives their paintings a superficial relation to what we usually think of as drawing and coincidentally results in some of their best work to date.

Despite the emphasis on wristy gestures in Korman's work and the visually dense accumulations of strokes with which Fishman builds up (or blows apart) her loose grids, their pictures are oddly disembodied, almost affectless, as though they strove to reduce painting to the bare fact of moving a loaded implement across a surface. Only the memory of the artist's hand survives to animate a kind of paradoxically physical anti-painting. Composition seems the accidental result of Korman's changing the way she moved her hand in transferring black, grey, or brownish pigment onto the canvas: a sinuous curve or a faint flush of rose becomes overwhelmingly important. Fishman often seems to see how much she can jettison – chromatic color, directions other than vertical and horizontal, depth, allusion – in her search for "essence" of painting. (I know this sounds like Greenberg's notion of modernist painting's gradual elimination of everything not integral to its medium.)

This dispassionate paring down of means is not the only significant aspect of Korman's and Fishman's pictures, but the idea that painting is simply restrained, if potentially expressive, mark-making is fundamental to both of these artists. They are not alone in adhering to this "cool," deadpan approach, but what distinguishes their work is its lack of fashionable cynicism, its avowal that painting, no matter how disciplined, held-back, or reduced, *matters*. In contrast to many of their fellow "neo-abstractionists," who make conceptualized comments on the *appearance* of abstract painting, in the manner of, for example, Gerhard Richter, Fishman and Korman make committed, serious paintings. (A depressing Richter show at Marian Goodman, at the same time as Fishman's and Korman's exhibitions, offered an interesting comparison; this time, we were offered pictures about the size and proportion of television screens, in tasteful, sweet hues – the domesticated version of Richter's product.)

Caio Fonseca's recent work at Knoedler provided further evidence that Richter and his followers notwithstanding, non-ironic "real abstract painting" continues to flourish. Fonseca's recent work rings changes on a format in which unnameable shapes are "carved" out of an expanse of color by overpainting, re-excavating, and drastically simplifying a relatively complex initial configuration. Parallel lines, now explicit, now all but lost, run through it all, like a ground bass. (The painter is also an accomplished and serious pianist with special expertise in the Baroque, who frequently speaks of his paintings in musical terms.)



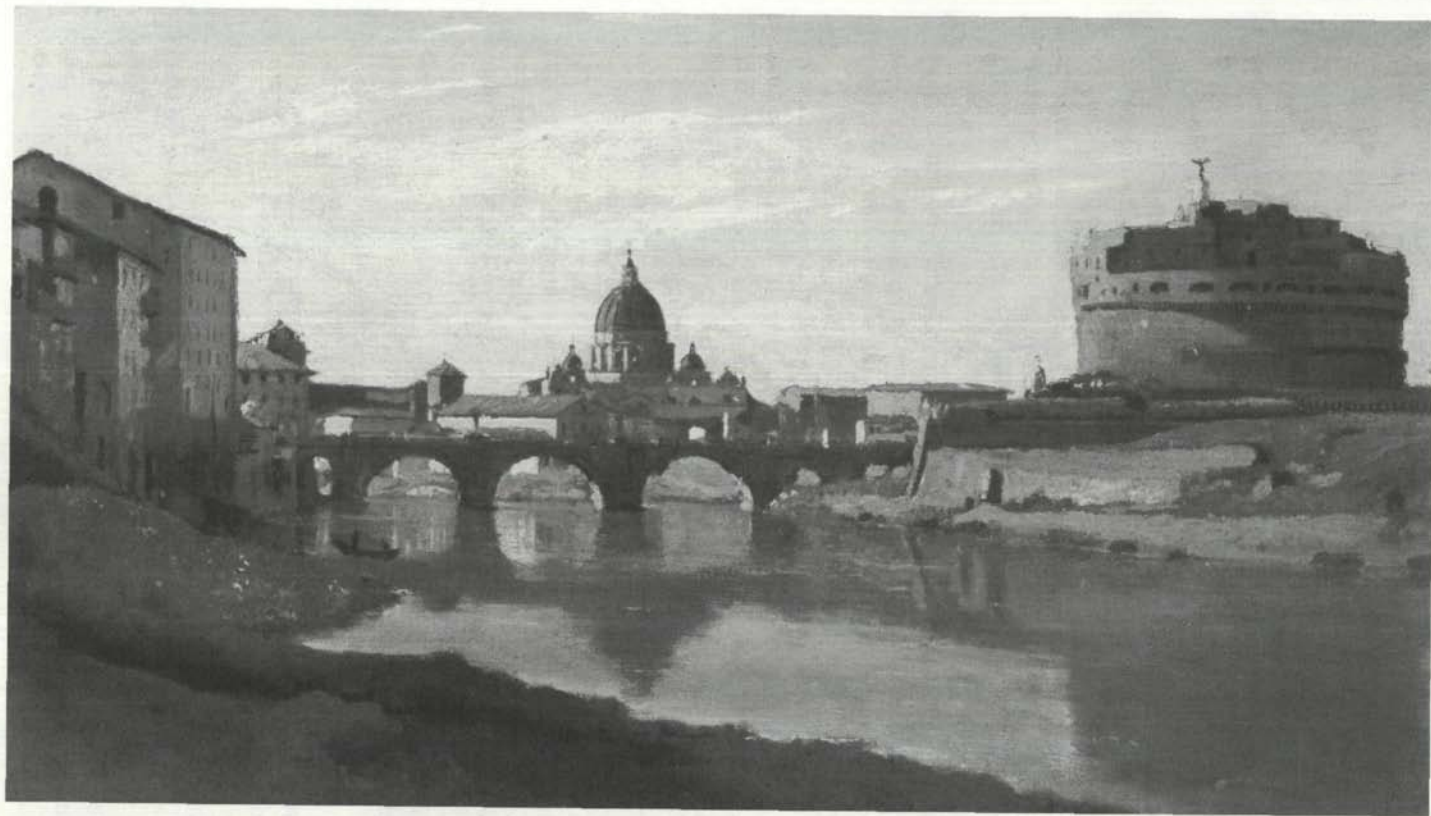
Robin Bruch, *Blue Sky*, 1996, acrylic on canvas, 66 inches x 66 inches.
Courtesy of Robin Bruch.

In his works on paper, Fonseca gives free rein to his delicate touch, his ability to invent (or discover) the free-wheeling, animated shapes that float across and in the superimposed layers of color, employing a vocabulary of tight drawing-gestures that seems perfectly appropriate to the intimate scale of paper; the smallest, most meticulous marks function like ornamentation in Baroque performance. On a larger scale, on canvas, these tiny gestures risk seeming precious. To my eye, Fonseca's best recent paintings were not only the loosest and apparently least calculated, but the ones with the largest shape-protagonists. A couple of mid-sized canvases, one with an irresistible Pompeiian red expanse, the other a delectable brown-black, both with slightly slapdash, generously scaled "escapes" from underneath, were among the strongest of the new works.

Fonseca is young, gifted, and blessed (or cursed) with the visual equivalent of perfect pitch – an ability to create refined, beautifully resolved, harmonious images. The best canvases in his recent show suggested that he is also capable of exploring an invigorating dissonance, and I hope he continues to do so.

Undoing Geometry was a provocative group show organized by Michael Chisholm for the Shirley Fitterman Gallery at CUNY's Borough of Manhattan Community College. Chisholm's choices, Frances Barth, Robin Bruch, John Greer, Jill Nathanson, and Rodney White, work in very different ways, from Barth's formidable explorations of flat expanse and spatial allusion, to Greer's updates of a high-chroma geometry I associate with the 1960s. What unites them is the not always peaceful coexistence in their paintings of rational, geometric notions of order, and of reliance on intuition, even of narrative aspirations. In Barth's fusions of geology, mapping, and abstractness or Nathanson's meditations on expressive, elemental oppositions of color, touch, and edge, the tension between conflicting elements is enriching and meaningful. This obtains, also, in Bruch's warped grids, with their complex color rhymes and syncopated rhythms, particularly when the irregular divisions are large enough to allow surface, as well as hue, to come into play. This tension is less apparent, alas, in White's modish oppositions of appropriated images and geometric overlay, but as a whole *Undoing Geometry* provided further assurance that thoughtful, felt abstract painting is alive and healthy.

Two not-to-be-missed shows of the past season, *Max Beckmann in Exile*, at the downtown Guggenheim, and *In the Light of Italy: Corot and Early Open-Air Painting*, at the Brooklyn Museum, occupied opposite ends of the emotional and formal spectrum. The Guggenheim exhibition brought together the most ambitious, key works of Beckmann's last decades, when excoriated by the Nazis as a decadent artist, forbidden to teach or exhibit, he fled Germany for Amsterdam and, eventually, the United States. The



Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, *View of St. Peter's and the Castel Sant' Angelo*, 1826-1828, oil on paper, mounted on canvas, 8 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches x 15 inches. The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. Courtesy of The Brooklyn Museum.

Brooklyn show, by contrast, gathered modest efforts by a group of mostly little-known eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europeans, unpretentious, on-the-spot studies of picturesque Italian motifs. The most dramatic thing about them – apart from the excellence of individual works – is that they ultimately helped to change the very nature of landscape painting.

While the ravishing touch and masterly paint handling manifest in the works in *Beckmann in Exile* were exhilarating, the show was almost overwhelming in its emotional force. Beckmann's disquieting tableaux of performers, mythic heroes, bellboys, and party-goers are at once artificial and completely convincing, introspective and emblematic of larger issues. They can serve as haunting metaphors for the terrible first half of this troubled century. But the intense emotional pitch and raucous tone of these paintings are functions not only of disturbing imagery, but of claustrophobically-packed compositions, angular drawing, and saturated color that seems to fight its way to the surface through a sea of dense black pigment, evidence of modernism's fusion of means and meaning.

In the Light of Italy, quite the opposite, was an exercise in pleasure, a cornucopia of fresh, spontaneous studies of picturesque ruins, Renaissance villas, celebrated beauty spots, formal gardens, and the like, rendered with apparently artless directness. If Beckmann's fierce canvases embodied modernism's belief in the role of the artist not simply as observer, but as interpreter, inventor, and exorcist, the works in *In the Light of Italy* posited a more traditional view of the artist as a dispassionate, if sensitive eye, a translator of visible reality – and a beautiful, luminous, and suggestive visible reality, at that. The heart of the show was, of course, its radiant Corot oil sketches of Rome and the campagna. Broadly painted, tonally assured, with every nuance of light translated into a bold stroke of subtly adjusted color, the Corots made almost everything else seem inadequate and a little dingy. There were exceptions of course, such as Thomas Jones's pure, economical townscapes, like proto-Morandis, or François-Maurius Granet's solidly constructed views of Roman architecture, vivid reminders of Granet's influence on a fellow native of Aix-en-Provence, Paul Cézanne.

The artists who painted these unpretentious pictures did so to educate themselves, just as they drew from classical statues, to absorb firsthand the settings and qualities of light of the classical landscape to be put to use, in the studio, as appropriate backgrounds for history paintings dealing with mythology and antiquity. To twentieth-century eyes, the best of these studies seem not only complete, but all the better for being direct and unedited, instead of being translated into the formulae of studio painting. And, indeed, some adventurous artists, notably Corot and his associates among the Barbizon School and later, the Impressionists, thought so, too. The rest, as they say, is art history.

SUSAN HAACK

“We Pragmatists . . .”: Peirce and Rorty in Conversation

SUSAN HAACK: Let me begin by asking Professor Rorty to explain how he feels about philosophers like you, Mr. Peirce, who take themselves to be seeking the truth.

RICHARD RORTY: It is . . . more difficult than it used to be to locate a real live metaphysical prig. [But] you can still find [philosophers] who will solemnly tell you that they are seeking *the truth*, not just a story or a consensus but an honest-to-God, down-home, accurate representation of the way the world is . . . lovably old-fashioned prigs (EHO, p.86).

SUSAN HAACK: Mr. Peirce?

CHARLES SANDERS PEIRCE: In order to reason well . . . , it is absolutely necessary to possess . . . such virtues as intellectual honesty and sincerity and a real love of truth (2.82). The cause [of the success of scientific inquirers] has been that the motive which has carried them to the laboratory and the field has been a craving to know how things really were . . . (1.34). [Genuine inquiry consists] in diligent inquiry into truth for truth's sake (1.44), . . . in actually drawing the bow upon truth with intentness in the eye, with energy in the arm (1.235).

[When] it is no longer the reasoning which determines what the conclusion shall be, but . . . the conclusion which determines what the reasoning shall be . . . this is sham reasoning. . . . The effect of this shamming is that men come to look upon reasoning as mainly decorative . . . The result of this state of things is, of course, a rapid deterioration of intellectual vigor . . . (1.57-8).

RR: “Justification” [is] a social phenomenon rather than a transaction between “the knowing subject” and “reality” (PMN, p.9), . . . not a matter of a . . . relation between ideas (or words) and objects, but of conversation, of social practice . . . We understand knowledge when we understand the

Editor's Note:

This piece is an imaginary confrontation between Charles Sanders Peirce and Richard Rorty.

social justification of belief, and thus have no need to view it as accuracy of representation (p.170).

CSP: The result [as I said] is, of course, a rapid deterioration of intellectual vigor. This is just what is taking place among us before our eyes. . . . Man loses his conceptions of truth and of reason (1.58, cont. and 1.59).

RR: I do not have much use for notions like . . . “objective truth” (TWO, p.141). [The] pragmatist view [is] of rationality as civility, . . . [as] respect for the opinions of those around one, . . . of “true” as a word which applies to those beliefs upon which we are able to agree . . . (SS, pp.44, 40, 45).

CSP: [As I was saying,] man loses his conceptions of truth and of reason. If he sees one man assert what another denies, he will, if he is concerned, choose his side and set to work by all means in his power to silence his adversaries. The truth for him is that for which he fights (1.59, cont.).

RR: Truth [is] entirely a matter of solidarity (ORT, p.32). There is nothing to be said about either truth or rationality apart from descriptions of the familiar procedures of justification which a given society – *ours* – uses . . . (SS, p.42).

CSP: You certainly opine that there is such a thing as Truth. Otherwise, reasoning and thought would be without a purpose. What do you mean by there being such a thing as Truth? You mean that something is SO . . . whether you, or I, or anybody thinks it is so or not. . . . The essence of the opinion is that there is *something* that is SO, no matter if there be an overwhelming vote against it (2.135). Every man is fully satisfied that there is such a thing as truth, or he would not ask any question. *That* truth consists in a conformity to something *independent of his thinking it to be so*, or of any man’s opinion on that subject (5.211).

Truth [is] overwhelmingly forced upon the mind in experience as the effect of an independent reality (5.564). The essence of truth lies in its resistance to being ignored (2.139).

RR: Some philosophers . . . insist that natural science discovers truth rather than makes it. . . . Other philosophers [like myself] . . . have concluded that science is no more than the handmaiden of technology (CIS, pp.3-4).

CSP: There are certain mummified pedants who have never waked to the truth that the act of knowing a real object alters it. They are curious specimens of humanity, and . . . I am one of them . . . (5.555).

RR: My rejection of traditional notions of rationality can be summed up by saying that the only sense in which science is exemplary is that it is a

model of human solidarity (SS, p.46).

CSP: Other methods of settling opinion have [certain advantages] over scientific investigation. A man should consider well of them; and then he should consider that, after all, he wishes his opinions to coincide with the fact . . . (5.387).

RR: . . . I think that the very idea of a “fact of the matter” is one we would be better off without (PDP, p.271).

CSP: . . . he should consider that, after all, he wishes his opinions to coincide with the fact, and . . . there is no reason why the results of those . . . [other] methods should do so (5.387, cont.).

RR: “True sentences work because they correspond to the way things are” . . . [is an] empty metaphysical compliment, . . . [a] rhetorical pat on the back . . . [The pragmatist] drops the notion of truth as correspondence with reality altogether . . . (CP, p.xvii).

CSP: Truth is the conformity of a representamen to its object, *its* object, ITS object, mind you (5.554).

[However], that truth is the correspondence of a representation to its object is, as Kant says, merely the nominal definition of it. Truth belongs exclusively to propositions. A proposition has a subject (or set of subjects) and a predicate. The subject is a sign; the predicate is a sign; and the proposition is a sign that the predicate is a sign of that of which the subject is a sign. If it be so, it is true. But what does this correspondence . . . of the sign to its object consist in? The pragmaticist answers this question as follows. . . . If we can find out the right method of thinking and can follow it out . . . then truth can be nothing more nor less than the last result to which the following out of this method would ultimately carry us (5.553).

RR: There are . . . two senses apiece of ‘true’ and ‘real’ and ‘correct representation of reality,’ . . . the homely use of ‘true’ to mean roughly ‘what you can defend against all comers,’ . . . [the] homely and shopworn sense [and] the specifically ‘philosophical’ sense . . . which, like the Ideas of Pure Reason, [is] designed precisely to stand for the Unconditioned . . . (PMN, pp.308-9.)

CSP: That to which the representation should conform, is itself . . . utterly unlike a thing-in-itself (5.553).

RR: [A] pragmatist theory . . . says that Truth is not the sort of thing one should expect to have a philosophically interesting theory about . . . (CP, p.xiii). Pragmatists think that the history of attempts to . . . define the word “true” . . . supports their suspicion that there is no interesting work to be

done in this area (p.xiv).

CSP: Truth is that concordance of an abstract statement with the ideal limit towards which endless investigation would tend to bring scientific belief. . . . The truth of the proposition that Caesar crossed the Rubicon consists in the fact that the further we push our archaeological and other studies, the more strongly will that conclusion force itself on our minds forever – or would do so, if study were to go on forever. . . . The same definitions equally hold in the normative sciences (5.565–6).

RR: I do not think . . . that [your account] is defensible . . . [It] uses a term – ‘ideal’ – which is just as fishy as ‘corresponds’ (PDT, pp.337, 338).

CSP: [A] false proposition is a proposition of which some interpretant represents that, on an occasion which it indicates, a percept will have a certain character, while the immediate perceptual judgment on that occasion is that the percept has not that character. A true proposition is a proposition belief in which would never lead to such disappointment so long as the proposition is not understood otherwise than it was intended (5.569).

Prof. Royce [like you] seems to think that this doctrine is unsatisfactory because it talks about what would be. . . . It may be he is right in this criticism; yet to our apprehension this “would be” is readily resolved . . . (8.113). [The] most important reals have the mode of being of what the nominalist calls “mere” words, that is, general types and would-bes. [His] “mere” reveals a complete misunderstanding . . . (8.191). The *will be*’s, the *actually is*’s, and the *have beens* are not the sum of the reals. . . . There are besides *would be*’s and *can be*’s that are real (8.216).

SH: I suspect, Professor Rorty, that your sympathies lie with the nominalist . . .

RR: Nominalists like myself – those for whom language is a tool rather than a medium, and for whom a concept is just the regular use of a mark or noise – . . . see language as just human beings using marks and noises to get what they want. (EHO, pp.126–7).

The right idea, according to us nominalists, is that “recognition of meaning” is simply ability to substitute sensible signs . . . for other signs, . . . and so on indefinitely. This . . . doctrine is found . . . in [your writings] . . . (TMoL, p.211).

CSP: The nominalistic *Weltanschauung* has become incorporated into what I will venture to call the very flesh and blood of the average modern mind. (5.61). Modern nominalists are mostly superficial men . . . (5.312).

[A] realist is simply one who knows no more recondite reality than that which is represented in a true representation (5.312, cont.). I am myself a scholastic realist of a somewhat extreme stripe (5.470). Nomenclature involves classification; and classification is true or false, and the generals to which it refers are either reals in the one case, or figments in the other (5.453).

Pragmatism could hardly have entered a head that was not already convinced that there are real generals (5.503).

SH: I wonder how Professor Rorty feels about your references to “true representations” . . .

RR: Pragmatism [is] anti-representationalism (PPD, p.1).

CSP: REPRESENT: to stand for, that is, to be in such a relation to another that for certain purposes it is treated by some mind as if it were that other. . . . When it is desired to distinguish between that which represents and the . . . relation of representing, the former may be termed the “representamen,” the latter the “representation” (2.273).

A sign, or *representamen*, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It . . . creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its *object* . . . in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the *ground* of the representamen (2.228).

RR: The notion of “accurate representation” is simply an . . . empty compliment which we pay to those beliefs which are successful in helping us do what we want to do (PMN, p.10).

CSP: It is as though a man should address a land surveyor as follows: “You do not make a true representation of the land; you only measure lengths from point to point . . . you have to do solely with lines. But the land is a surface . . . You, therefore, fail entirely to represent the land.” The surveyor, I think, would reply, “Sir, you have proved that . . . my map *is not* the land. I never pretended that it was. But that does not prevent it from truly representing the land, as far as it goes” (5.329).

SH: I am beginning to think that you may disagree with each other not only about nominalism, but about the nature and status of metaphysics . . .

RR: The pragmatist . . . does not think of himself as *any* kind of a metaphysician . . . (CP, p.xxviii).

CSP: [The Pragmatic Maxim] will serve to show that almost every proposition of ontological metaphysics is either meaningless gibberish – one

word being defined by other words, and they by still others, without any real conception ever being reached – or else is downright absurd; so that all such rubbish being swept away, what will remain of philosophy will be a series of problems capable of investigation by the observational methods of the true sciences. . . . So, instead of merely jeering at metaphysics . . . the pragmaticist extracts from it a precious essence . . . (5.423).

We should expect to find metaphysics . . . to be somewhat more difficult than logic, but still on the whole one of the simplest of sciences, as it is one whose main principles must be settled before very much progress can be gained either in psychics or in physics. Historically we are astonished to find that it has been a mere arena of ceaseless and trivial disputation. But we also find that it has been pursued in a spirit the very contrary of that of wishing to learn the truth, which is the most essential requirement *Metaphysics* is the proper designation for the third, and completing department of coenoscropy Its business is to study the most general features of reality and real objects. But in its present condition it is . . . a puny, rickety and scrofulous science. It is only too plain that those who pretend to cultivate it carry not the hearts of true men of science within their breast (6.4-6).

Here let us set down almost at random a small specimen of the questions of metaphysics which press . . . for industrious and solid investigation: Whether or no there be any real indefiniteness, or real possibility and impossibility? Whether there be any strictly individual existence? Whether there is any distinction . . . between fact and fancy? Or between the external and the internal worlds? What general . . . account can be given of the different qualities of feeling . . . ? Do all possible qualities of sensation . . . form one continuous system . . . ? . . . Is Time a real thing . . . ? How about Space . . . ? . . . Is hylozoism an opinion, actual or conceivable, rather than a senseless vocable . . . ? . . . What is consciousness or mind like . . . ? (6.6).

RR: Metaphysicians see [books] as divided according to disciplines, corresponding to different objects of knowledge. [We] ironists see them as divided according to traditions . . . (CIS, pp.75-6).

CSP: All science is either, A. Science of Discovery; B. Science of Review; or C. Practical Science. . . . Science of Discovery is either, I. Mathematics; II. Philosophy; or III. Idioscopy. . . . Philosophy is divided into *a*. Phenomenology; *b*. Normative Science; *c*. Metaphysics. . . . Phenomenology is . . . a single study. Normative Science has three widely separated divisions: i. Esthetics; ii. Ethics. iii. Logic. . . . Metaphysics may be divided into, i, General Metaphysics, or Ontology; ii, Psychical, or Religious, Metaphysics, concerned chiefly with the questions of 1, God, 2, Freedom, 3, Immortality; and iii, Physical Metaphysics, which discusses

the real nature of time, space, laws of nature, matter, etc. (1.181-192).

SH: Could you please explain your reference to “ironists,” Professor Rorty?

RR: [Ironists] take naturally to the line of thought developed in . . . [my] book. . . . The opposite of irony is common sense. (CIS, p.74).

CSP: Pragmaticism will be sure to carry critical common-sensism in its arms . . . (5.499).

RR: Sentences like . . . “Truth is independent of the human mind” are simply platitudes used to inculcate . . . the common sense of the West (CIS, p.76-7).

CSP: The Critical Common-sensist holds that all the veritably indubitable beliefs are *vague* . . . (5.505); [that they] refer to a somewhat primitive mode of life . . . (5.511); [he] has a high esteem for doubt (5.514); [he] criticizes the critical method (5.523).

RR: [We ironists emphasize] the spirit of playfulness . . . (CIS, p.39). [We are] never quite able to take [our]selves seriously . . . (p.73).

CSP: [The Critical Common-sensist] is none of those overcultivated Oxford dons – I hope their day is over – whom any discovery that brought quietus to a vexed question would evidently vex because it would end the fun of arguing around it and about it and over it (5.520).

RR: . . . I have spent forty years looking for a coherent . . . way of formulating my worries about what, if anything, philosophy is good for (TWO, p.146).

CSP: It is true that philosophy is in a lamentably crude condition at present; . . . most philosophers set up a pretension of knowing all there is to know – a pretension calculated to disgust anybody who is at home in any real science. But all we have to do is to turn our backs upon all such truly vicious conduct, and we shall find ourselves enjoying the advantages of having an almost virgin soil to till, where a given amount of really scientific work will bring in an extraordinary harvest . . . of very fundamental truth of exceptional value from every point of view (1.128).

SH: How do you feel about Mr. Peirce’s description of philosophy as “scientific work,” Professor Rorty?

RR: [One] side of pragmatism has been scientific. . . . Let me call the claim that there is [a] “reliable [scientific] method” “scientism” . . . If one takes the core of pragmatism to be its attempt to replace the notion of true

beliefs as representations . . . and instead to think of them as successful rules for action, then it becomes . . . hard to isolate a “method” that will embody this attitude (PWM, pp.260–262).

CSP: It is far better to let philosophy follow perfectly untrammelled a scientific method If that course be honestly and scrupulously carried out, the results reached, even if they be not altogether true, even if they be grossly mistaken, can not but be highly serviceable for the ultimate discovery of truth (1.644). Rational methods of inquiry . . . will make that result as speedy as possible . . . (7.78).

The first problems to suggest themselves to the inquirer into nature are far too complex . . . for any early solution What ought to be done, therefore, . . . is at first to substitute for those problems others much . . . more abstract The reasonably certain solutions of these last problems will throw a light . . . upon more concrete problems This method of procedure is that Analytic Method to which modern physics owes all its triumphs. It has been applied with great success in psychical sciences also. . . . It is reprobated by the whole Hegelian army, who think it ought to be replaced by the “Historic Method,” which studies complex problems in all their complexity, but which cannot boast any distinguished successes.

There are in science three fundamentally different kinds of reasoning, Deduction, . . . Induction, . . . and Retroduction . . . Analogy combines the characters of Induction and Retroduction (1.63–6).

SH: Do you share Mr. Peirce’s high regard for logic, Professor Rorty?

RR: Rigorous argumentation . . . is no more *generally* desirable than blocking the road of inquiry is generally desirable (CP, p.xli).

CSP: There are two qualifications which every true man of science possesses. . . . First, the dominant passion of his whole soul must be to find out the truth in some department Secondly, he must have a natural gift for reasoning, for severely critical thought (7.605). Logic is the theory of *right* reasoning, of what reasoning ought to be . . . (2.7).

RR: We no longer think of ourselves as having reliable “sources” of knowledge called “reason” or “sensation” . . . (OE, p.531).

CSP: The data from which inference sets out and upon which all reasoning depends are the *perceptual facts*, which are the intellect’s fallible record of the *percepts*, or “evidence of the senses” (2.143).

RR: Eventually I got over [my] worry about circular argumentation by deciding that the test of philosophical truth was overall coherence, rather

than deducibility from unquestioned first principles. But this didn't help much (TWO, p.145).

CSP: The reader will, I trust, be too well grounded in logic to mistake . . . mutual support for a vicious circle in reasoning (6.315).

Philosophy ought . . . to trust . . . to the multitude and variety of its arguments . . . Its reasoning should not form a chain which is no stronger than the weakest link, but a cable whose fibers may be ever so slender, provided they are sufficiently numerous and intimately connected (5.265).

RR: But [as I said] this didn't help much. For coherence is a matter of avoiding contradictions, and St. Thomas' advice, "When you meet a contradiction, make a distinction," makes that pretty easy (TWO, p.145).

SH: How do you feel about Professor Rorty's observation that making distinctions is "pretty easy," Mr. Peirce?

CSP: . . . Kant's conception of the nature of necessary reasoning is clearly shown by the logic of relations to be utterly mistaken, and his distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments, . . . which is based on that conception, is so utterly confused that it is difficult or impossible to do anything with it (5.176).

SH: Perhaps, while we are on the subject of logic, you could explain your attitude to the principle of bivalence . . .

RR: The pragmatist . . . should not succumb to the temptation to . . . take sides on the issue of "bivalence" (CP, p.xxvi).

CSP: Triadic logic is universally true (*Logic Notebook* for 1909).

SH: Perhaps, Professor Rorty, it would be helpful if you would explain how you see the relation of philosophy to science . . .

RR: The pragmatist is betting that what succeeds the "scientific," positivist culture which the Enlightenment produced will be *better* (CP, p.xxxviii). Science as the source of "truth" . . . is one of the Cartesian notions which vanish when the ideal of "philosophy as strict science" vanishes (p.34). Pragmatism . . . views science as one genre of literature – or, put the other way around, literature and the arts as inquiries, on the same footing as scientific inquiries (p.xliii). Philosophy is best seen as a kind of writing. It is delimited, as is any literary genre, not by form or matter, but by tradition. . . . Philosophy as more than a kind of writing – is an illusion. . . . [One] tradition takes scientific truth as the center of philosophical concern (and scorns the notion of incommensurable scientific world-pictures). It asks how well other fields of inquiry conform to the model of science. The sec-

ond [pragmatist] tradition takes science as one (not especially privileged nor interesting) sector of culture, a sector which . . . only makes sense when viewed historically (pp.92-3). Literature has now displaced religion, science, and philosophy as the presiding discipline of our culture . . . (p.155).

SH: Mr. Peirce?

CSP: [I] desire to rescue the good ship Philosophy for the service of Science from the hands of lawless rovers of the sea of literature . . . (5.449).

RR: A few [lovably old-fashioned prigs] will even claim to write in a clear, precise, transparent way, priding themselves on manly straightforwardness, on abjuring "literary" devices (EHO, p.86).

CSP: As for that phrase "studying in a literary spirit" it is impossible to express how nauseating it is to any scientific man . . . (1.33).

RR: As soon as a program to put philosophy on the secure path of science succeeds, it simply converts philosophy into a boring academic specialty (PMN, pp.384-5).

CSP: In order to be deep it is requisite to be dull . . . The new pragmatists . . . are *lively* . . . (5.17). The apostle of Humanism [F. C. S. Schiller, like you] says that professional philosophists "have rendered philosophy like unto themselves, abstruse, arid, abstract, and abhorrent." But I conceive that some branches of science are not in a healthy state if they are *not* abstruse, arid, and abstract, in which case, . . . it will be as Shakespeare said . . .

Not harsh and crabbèd, as dull fools suppose,
But musical as is Apollo's lute . . . (5.537).

The reader may find the matter [of my "Minute Logic"] so dry, husky and innutritious to the spirit that he cannot imagine that there is any human good in it. . . . But the fault is his. It shall not be more tedious than the multiplication table, . . . and as the multiplication table is worth the pains of learning, . . . so shall this be . . . (2.15).

SH: Professor Rorty, your view of philosophy as a genre of literature puzzles me; surely pragmatism is a form of empiricism?

RR: Pragmatism has gradually broken the historical links that once connected it to empiricism . . . (PPD, p.4).

CSP: The kind of philosophy which interests me and must, I think, interest everybody is that philosophy, which uses the most rational methods it

can devise, for finding out the little that can as yet be found out about the universe of mind and matter from those observations which every person can make in every hour of his waking life . . . laboratory-philosophy . . . (1.126, 129).

RR: From the radically anti-representationalist viewpoint I . . . commend . . . pragmatism can be seen as gradually . . . escaping from scientism (PPD, p.4).

CSP: [Philosophical theories] have the same sort of basis as scientific results have. That is to say, they rest on experience – on the total everyday experience of many generations. . . . Such experience is worthless for distinctively scientific purposes . . . although all science . . . would have to shut up shop if she should manage to escape accepting them. No “wisdom” could ever have discovered argon; yet within its proper sphere, . . . the instinctive result of human experience ought to have so vastly more weight than any scientific result, that to make laboratory experiments to ascertain, for example, whether there be any uniformity in nature or no, would vie with adding a teaspoonful of saccharine to the ocean in order to sweeten it (5.522).

RR: The basic motive of pragmatism was . . . a continuation of the Romantic reaction to the Enlightenment’s sanctification of natural science (EHO, p.18).

CSP: [Science] embodies the epitome of man’s intellectual development (7.49). Iconoclastic inventions are always cheap and often nasty (4.71).

SH: May we go back for a minute to Professor Rorty’s reference to Romanticism?

RR: The Platonist and the positivist share a reductionist view of metaphor: They think metaphors are either paraphrasable or useless for the one serious purpose which language has, namely, representing reality. By contrast, the Romantic has an expansionist view . . . Romantics attribute metaphor to a mysterious faculty called the “imagination,” a faculty they suppose to be at the very center of the self. . . (CIS, p.19).

CSP: When a man desires ardently to know the truth, his first effort will be to imagine what that truth can be. . . . there is, after all, nothing but imagination that can ever supply him an inkling of the truth. . . . For thousands of men a falling apple was nothing but a falling apple; and to compare it to the moon would by them be deemed “fanciful.” It is not too much to say that next after the passion to learn there is no quality so indispensable to the successful prosecution of science as imagination. . . . There are, no doubt, kinds of imagination of no value in science, mere

artistic imagination, mere dreaming of opportunities for gain. The scientific imagination dreams of explanation and laws (1.46-8).

Cuvier said that Metaphysics is nothing but Metaphor. . . . If metaphor be taken literally to mean an expression of a similitude when the sign of predication is employed instead of the sign of likeness – as when we say this man *is* a fox instead of this man is like a fox, – I deny entirely that metaphysicians are given to metaphor . . . but if Cuvier was only using a metaphor himself, and meant by metaphor broad comparison on the ground of characters of a formal and highly abstract kind, – then, indeed, metaphysics professes to be metaphor . . . (7.590).

RR: [A] philosopher . . . like myself . . . thinks of himself as auxiliary to the poet rather than to the physicist. . . . Interesting philosophy is . . . a contest between an entrenched vocabulary which has become a nuisance and a half-formed new vocabulary which vaguely promises great things. (CIS, pp.7-9).

SH: But I don't think Mr. Peirce would deny the importance of linguistic innovation . . .

CSP: Every symbol is a living thing, . . . its meaning inevitably grows, incorporates new elements and throws off old ones. . . . Science is continually gaining new conceptions; and every new *scientific* conception should receive a new word. . . . Different systems of expression are often of the greatest advantage (2.222).

RR: It is a feature of . . . science that the vocabulary in which problems are posed is accepted by all those who count as contributing to the subject. The vocabulary may be changed, but that is only because a new theory has been discovered. . . . The vocabulary in which the *explicanda* are described has to remain constant (CP, pp.141-2).

CSP: How much more the word *electricity* means now than it did in the days of Franklin; how much more the term planet means now than it did in the time of Hipparchus. These words have acquired information . . . (7.587).

Symbols grow. . . . In use and in experience, [the] meaning [of a symbol] grows. Such words as *force*, *law*, *wealth*, *marriage*, bear for us very different meanings from those they bore to our barbarous ancestors (2.302).

SH: I gather, Professor Rorty, from your references to “irony” and “playfulness,” that you disapprove of too solemn an attitude to philosophy as a profession . . .

RR: I would welcome a culture dominated by “the Rich Aesthete, the Manager and the Therapist” so long as *everybody* who wants to gets to be

an aesthete . . . The ironic, playful intellectual is a desirable character-type . . . (FMR, pp.16, 15).

SH: Mr. Peirce?

CSP: We remark three classes of men. The first consists of those for whom the chief thing is the qualities of feelings. These men create art. The second consists of the practical men . . . The third class consists of men to whom nothing seems great but reason. . . . Those are the natural scientific men . . . (1.43).

It is infinitely better that men devoid of genuine scientific curiosity should not barricade the road of science with empty books and embarrassing assumptions . . . (1.645).

RR: Intellectual gifts - intelligence, judgment, curiosity, imagination, . . . kinks in the brain . . . provide these gifts . . . (CIS, pp.187-8).

CSP: There is a kink in my damned brain that prevents me from thinking as other people think . . .

RR: As we look about at the manly, aggressive and businesslike academics of our . . . time, . . . the well-funded professor[s], jetting home after a day spent advising men of power . . . [we see that the] American academic mind has long since discovered the joy of making its own special enterprise "greater and better organized and a mightier engine in the general life" (CP, p.61).

CSP: Wherever there is a large class of academic professors who are provided with good incomes and looked up to as gentlemen, scientific inquiry must languish. Wherever the bureaucrats are the more learned class, the case will be still worse (1.51).

SH: And how do you see the relation of philosophy to society?

RR: Pragmatism must be defined as the claim that the function of inquiry is, in Bacon's words, to "relieve and benefit the condition of man" . . . (EHO, p.27).

CSP: [A] modern reader who is not in awe of [Bacon's] grandiloquence is chiefly struck by the inadequacy of his view of scientific procedure. . . . "He wrote on science like a Lord Chancellor," indeed, as Harvey, a genuine man of science said (5.361).

RR: Philosophy [is] *in the service* of democratic politics . . . (CIS, p.196). We pragmatists commend our antiessentialism and antilogocentrism on the ground of its harmony with the practices and aims of a democratic society . . . (EHO, p.135).

CSP: I must confess that I belong to that class of scallawags who purpose, with God's help, to look the truth in the face, whether doing so be conducive to the interests of society or not. Moreover, if I should ever attack that excessively difficult problem, 'What is for the true interest of society?' I should feel that I stood in need of a great deal of help from the science of legitimate inference . . . (8.143). Against the doctrine that social stability is the sole justification of scientific research . . . I have to object, first, that it is historically false . . . second, that it is bad ethics; and, third, that its propagation would retard the progress of science (8.135).

RR: [There have been in our century] three conceptions of the aim of philosophizing. They are the Husserlian (or 'scientistic') answer, the Heideggerian (or 'poetic') answer, and the pragmatist (or 'political') answer (EHO, p.9).

CSP: In my opinion, the present infantile condition of philosophy . . . is due to the fact that . . . it has chiefly been pursued by men who have not . . . been animated by the true scientific *Eros*; but who have . . . been inflamed with a desire to amend the lives of themselves and others . . . (1.620). The two masters, *theory* and *practice*, you cannot serve (1.642).

SH: It seems to me that the two of you have radically different conceptions of what pragmatism is. . .

RR: "Pragmatism" is a vague, ambiguous and overworked word (CP, p.160).

CSP: Many writers, . . . in spite of pragmatists' declarations, unanimous, reiterated, and most explicit, still remain unable to "catch on" to what we are driving at, and persist in twisting our purpose and purport all awry. . . [Pragmatism] is merely a method of ascertaining the meanings of hard words and of abstract concepts (5.464).

RR: The pragmatist . . . must struggle with the positivist for the position of radical anti-Platonist. . . . At first glance he looks like just another variety of positivist. (CP, p.xviii).

CSP: Pragmaticism is a species of prope-positivism (5.423).

RR: My first characterization of pragmatism is that it is simply anti-essentialism applied to notions like "truth," "knowledge," "language," "morality," and similar objects of philosophical theorizing. . . . There is no wholesale, epistemological way to direct, or criticize, or underwrite, the course of inquiry (CP, p.162). [A] second characterization of pragmatism might go like this: there is no epistemological difference between truth about what ought to be and truth about what is, nor any metaphysical dif-

ference between facts and values, nor any methodological difference between morality and science (p.163). . . . The pragmatists tell us, it is the vocabulary of practice rather than of theory . . . in which one can say something useful about truth (p.162). [A] third . . . characterization of pragmatism [is]: it is the doctrine that there are no constraints on inquiry save conversational ones. . . . The only sense in which we are constrained to truth is that, as [you] suggested, we can make no sense of the notion that the view which can survive all objections might be false. But objections – conversational constraints – cannot be anticipated (p.165).

CSP: To satisfy our doubts, . . . it is necessary that a method should be found by which our beliefs may be determined by nothing human, but by some external permanency – by something upon which our thinking has no effect. . . . It must be something which affects, or might affect, every man. . . . The method must be such that the ultimate conclusion of every man shall be the same. Such is the method of science (5.384).

RR: Once human desires are admitted into the criterion of “truth,” . . . we have become pragmatists. The pragmatist’s claim is that to know your desires is to know the criterion of truth . . . (EHO, pp.30-31).

CSP: It is necessary to note what is essentially involved in the Will to Learn. . . . I can excuse a person who has lost a dear companion and whose reason is in danger of giving way under the grief, for trying, on that account, to believe in a future life. . . . [But] I myself would not adopt a hypothesis . . . simply because the idea was pleasing to me. . . . That would be a crime against the integrity of . . . reason . . . (5.583, 598).

RR: What I am calling “pragmatism” might also be called “left-wing Kuhnianism” (SS, p.41).

CSP: An opinion which has of late years attained some vogue among men of science, [is] that we cannot expect any physical hypothesis to maintain its ground indefinitely even with modifications, but must expect that from time to time there will be a complete cataclysm that shall utterly sweep away old theories and replace them by new ones. As far as I know, this notion has no other basis than the history of science. Considering how very, very little science we have attained, and how infantile the history of science still is, it amazes me that anybody should propose to base a theory of knowledge upon the history of science alone. An emmet is far more competent to discourse upon the figure of the earth than we are to say what future millennia and millionennia may have in store for physical theories . . . The only really scientific theory that can be called old is the Ptolemaic system; and that has only been improved in details, not revolutionized

(2.150).

RR: [Your] contribution to pragmatism was merely to have given it a name . . . (CP, p.161).

CSP: It has probably never happened that any philosopher has attempted to give a general name to his own doctrine without that name's soon acquiring in common philosophical usage, a signification much broader than was originally intended. . . . [My] word "pragmatism" . . . begins to be met with occasionally in the literary journals, where it gets abused in the merciless way that words have to expect when they fall into literary clutches. . . . So, then, the writer, finding his bantling "pragmatism" so promoted, feels that it is time to kiss his child goodbye and relinquish it to its higher destiny; while to serve the precise purpose of expressing the original definition, he begs to announce the birth of the word "pragmaticism," which is ugly enough to be safe from kidnappers (5.143-4).

It is good economy for philosophy to provide itself with a vocabulary so outlandish that loose thinkers shall not be tempted to borrow its words. . . . Whoever deliberately uses a word . . . in any other sense than that which was conferred upon it by its sole rightful creator commits a shameful offense against the inventor of the symbol and against science, and it becomes the duty of the others to treat the act with contempt and indignation (2.223-4).

RR: Revolutionary movements within an intellectual discipline require a revisionist history of that discipline (CP, p.211).

CSP: It seems to me a pity [that the pragmatists of today] should allow a philosophy so instinct with life to become infected with seeds of death in such notions as that of . . . the mutability of truth . . . (6.485).

Except where otherwise indicated, Peirce's contributions are taken from:

Collected Papers, eds Hartshorne, C., Weiss, P. and Burks, A., Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1931-58; references by volume and paragraph number.

Peirce's comment about the kink in his brain is reported by E.T. Bell in *The Development of Mathematics*, McGraw-Hill, New York and London, 1949, p.519.

The quotation Peirce attributes to Shakespeare is actually from Milton's *Comus*.

Rorty's contributions to the conversation are taken from:

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TWO: "Trosky and the Wild Orchids," *Common Knowledge*, 1.3, 1992, 140-53.

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MORRIS DICKSTEIN

New Cinema: The Next Generation

As foreign film distribution in the United States has fallen apart or gone commercial, the New York Film Festival has become an even more essential venue for exposing American audiences to serious cinema. The Festival began in 1963 at the creative peak of the French New Wave, the new Italian cinema, and the work of directors like Buñuel and Bergman. The talent featured in the early years makes up a roll call of film history: Antonioni, Bellocchio, Bertolucci, Bresson, Buñuel, Chabrol, Dreyer, Franju, Godard, Ichikawa, Kurosawa, Losey, Melville, Olmi, Ozu, Pasolini, Ray, Resnais, Rohmer, Rosi, Rossellini, Varda, Visconti, and Wajda. As the film scene changed and such names grew scarce, the focus shifted to East European films, the new German cinema, and, more recently, Latin American, Asian, and American independent films. The choices could be perverse and infuriating, but they gave us our film education.

In most European countries except France, film production has disintegrated – a casualty of television and the Hollywood juggernaut. But the Festival continues to showcase provocative work from unlikely places, from Iran to Taiwan. The 1996 roster was a return to the Festival's roots in more ways than one. The unexpected abundance of French films recalled the Francophile passions of its first program director, Richard Roud. One exhilarating selection, Olivier Assayas's *Irma Vep*, was about a French director filming an *hommage* to Feuillade's silent serial *Les vampires*, a New Wave favorite I saw as a retrospective at the 1965 Festival. This year's most reckless film, *Breaking the Waves*, by a young Danish director, Lars von Trier, was partly inspired by the austere religious films of his difficult predecessor, Carl Theodor Dreyer, whose great swan song, *Gertrud*, was shown the same year. Another fine French film, Arnaud Desplechin's *How I Got Into an Argument . . . (my sex life)*, was clearly inspired by those aimless epics of student angst that Godard and Truffaut crafted around actors like Jean-Pierre Léaud, who himself plays the aging, over-the-hill director in *Irma Vep*. These gifted directors scarcely constitute a new wave, but at a time when most Hollywood films seem hackneyed and impersonal, this new generation looks back to the best work of the fifties and sixties as valuable examples of cinema as personal expression.

Among the films I saw at this year's festival, there were inevitably some duds and disappointments. The usually reliable Maurice

Pialat, whose work was first shown in 1968, builds *Le Garçu* around his own young son, Antoine, and his alter ego, the ubiquitous Gérard Depardieu. The boy shamelessly mugs for the camera, stealing every scene from the hapless adults around him, while his father, played by Depardieu, behaves just as willfully towards his estranged wife, his ex-wife, and his current mistress, always turning up at odd times, playing up to his boy as the only real anchor in his life. Eventually, it becomes hard to tell whether this is a movie *about* self-indulgence or simply the director's self-indulgent home movie.

Where *Le Garçu* seems half unscripted, Jacques Audiard's *A Self-Made Hero* is all too neatly dramatic, like the "quality" films that preceded the New Wave. Based on a novel about the French Resistance, it features Mathieu Kassovitz (here last year as director of the repellent slum drama, *La Haine*) as a shy, Zelig-like character who rises precipitously at the end of the war by sheer mimicry, faking Resistance activities he never even saw. His heroic past is too easily accepted by everyone from his gullible landlord and the resisters themselves to members of the postwar government. The "self-made hero" is believed because people *want* to believe him. His resourceful role-playing is a cynical metaphor for how most people actually get on in society. But the movie also takes a troubling revisionist view of the Resistance itself. Once exaggerated into myth, it can now be debunked as a kind of daydream if not an outright fabrication. If the movie shows there *were* real resisters, though not many, it also implies that the Resistance was something of a collective fantasy. *A Self-Made Hero* is a smooth, pleasant, polished piece of storytelling, but like Agnieszka Holland's *Europa, Europa* – in which a young Jew survives by impersonating a Nazi – it never really confronts the more disturbing implications of its hero's play-acting.

An even greater disappointment, though clearly popular with the audience, was Deepa Mehta's *Fire*, which projects a feminist fable about the horrors of patriarchy onto a New Delhi setting. It revolves around two sisters-in-law who are neglected by their husbands, one because all his passion is expended on his Chinese mistress, the other because *his* only passion is for his Hindu swami. The first swinish male, who keeps up a brisk trade in porno videos, is barely interested in consummating his marriage of convenience; the second is trying to tame his flesh and has not slept with his wife for thirteen years. Predictably, the two women not only form an alliance but begin an affair and run off with each other, passing through fire, like the legendary heroine Sita, to find the love and respect no chauvinist male would give them. Directed by an Indian woman who lives in Canada, the film, complete with a visit to the Taj Mahal and a slimy, masturbating servant, turns India into local color, picturesque but

benighted – ground for Western condescension.

To turn from these films to the work of Lars von Trier or Olivier Assayas is to breathe a different air. Like Mehta's *Fire*, von Trier's epic *Breaking the Waves* is a story of love and passion that begins with the marriage of a remarkably innocent woman. Set on the forbidding Scottish coast, among dour Christians as patriarchal as anyone in India, the movie is at once sensual and visionary, trashy and transcendental. The heroine, Bess, wonderfully played by English stage actress Emily Watson, is part idiot, part saint. Her face, whether twisted with anguish, beaming with sexual mischief, or lit up with child-like joy, is one of the most expressive in recent films. It reminded me of Giulietta Masina's Chaplinesque performance in Fellini's *La Strada*, another movie about improbable love and martyred innocence of which this film is virtually a remake. (Dreyer's *Passion of Joan of Arc* may be an additional source.)

The film begins with close-ups of Bess's face as she explains to the church elders why she must marry an outsider, Jan (Stellan Skarsgard), a hunky Scandinavian who works on an offshore oil rig. After a boisterous wedding and a wildly passionate honeymoon, Jan returns to the rig over Bess's howling protests. In one of her little dialogues with God she wishes Jan back, only to see her wish fulfilled in the worst way: he returns crippled from the neck down. From this point the movie spirals downward until it becomes almost agonizing to watch. At Jan's insistence, Bess begins picking up men who invariably abuse her. In a mixture of lurid tabloid fantasy and religious vision, Bess's self-sacrifice leads to Jan's miraculous recovery – a distinctly male dream of redemption. But the questionable plot is less important than the film's rigorous technique and arresting cinematography, especially the use of hand-held camera, improvised movement and dialogue, tight close-ups, and grainy, tape-transferred film stock, all of which heighten the film's emotional intensity and near-documentary authenticity.

Breaking the Waves is almost a textbook example of the new international art film. As Hollywood looses itself in violent action, expensive special effects, or numbskull comedy, independent filmmakers strain for greater reality through elliptical narratives and documentary techniques that focus on character, gesture, and small, intimate moments of human interaction. This was what Scorsese achieved in *Mean Streets* more than twenty years ago, what John Cassavetes did brilliantly in *Faces* and *A Woman Under the Influence*. They proved to be prophets of today's most daring and self-conscious filmmaking. Such movies depend less on plot than on actors who can feel their way into a part and build it up from the inside, as Brenda Blethyn and Timothy Spall do in Mike Leigh's *Secrets and Lies*, the Festival's opening night film.

Like *Breaking the Waves*, *Secrets and Lies* is brilliantly effective as we get to know its characters, but loses credibility in its unconvincing denouement. Mike Leigh is renowned for developing scripts through months of improvisations that are a cross between acting exercises and encounter sessions. Here the premise is improbable: a cultivated black woman who was once given up for adoption seeks out her birth mother, who turns out to be white. Both of them are shocked, but ultimately the newcomer brings to a head a series of family conflicts which are then all too easily resolved. Brenda Blethyn plays a working-class woman whose life is a mess: she has a daughter who can't stand her, who is on the verge of repeating her mother's mistakes, and a younger brother, played by Spall, whose wife is childless, bitter, and a perfect snob. Leigh's goal is to expose the buried humanity of each of these characters by having them face up to the secrets that have poisoned their lives and alienated them from each other. When the movie works – as when Blethyn first hysterically rejects, then gradually comes to accept her black daughter, or when Spall, a photographer, is reaching out to all the unhappy women who make up his family – it's as if Jean Renoir were using *cinéma vérité* to make an English version of *An American Family*. But by glossing over the racial barriers for family issues, and by leading us to a heartwarming Hollywood ending, Leigh partly defaults on the intricate reality he and his actors have so beautifully built up.

The same quiet authenticity we have come to expect from Leigh is also writ large in Assayas's depiction of the filmmaking process in *Irma Vep*. Films about making movies are usually bitterly satirical like Altman's *The Player*, farcical like Tom DiCillo's recent *Living in Oblivion*, or reverential and navel-gazing like Truffaut's *Day for Night*. Assayas, on the other hand, treats the cast, crew, and director of the film-within-a-film as the equivalent of Mike Leigh's dysfunctional family. As in *Secrets and Lies*, we observe them from the point of view of an outsider, in this case Maggie Cheung, the siren of Hong Kong cinema, who speaks no French but has come to appear in her first French movie – one altogether different from the action flicks that made her an international star.

In a revealing interview, Assayas told me that the presence of Cheung was the linchpin of his movie – he wrote the script around her. This exotic touch enables him to open up a dialogue with both the French cinematic past of Feuillade, Godard, and Truffaut and the present-day commercial cinema of John Woo, Jackie Chan, and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Assayas himself is every inch the French cinema intellectual, a former editor of *Cahiers du Cinéma* with a superb command of film history and impeccable taste in other people's movies. (It was he who urged me to see *Breaking the Waves*. I had thoroughly disliked von Trier's

clumsy, pretentious thriller *Zentropa*.) *Irma Vep* includes its *cinéaste* touches: the evocation of Feuillade; a mock interview between Maggie Cheung and an overbearing reporter who barely lets her speak as he denounces French cinema for its intellectuality; a glancing tribute to the austere political cinema of the 1970s. But the movie is at its casual best as we watch the cast and crew having dinner around a long table, or when we overhear the sexual gossip between two women in the kitchen.

As a film about filmmaking, rich with improvisation and cinematic allusions, *Irma Vep* inevitably brings to mind the New Wave. Yet the two directors in the movie, played by New Wave icons Jean-Pierre Léaud and Lou Castel, come across as blustery remnants of the past: both look like they've seen better days. The first turns on his own work, breaks down, and drops out; the other clumsily steps in, dumps the star, and hastens to impose his own ideas. Assayas made clear to me that he hates the "industrial" model of filmmaking that's riding high today but finds the French tradition of "intellectual" filmmaking equally sterile if it fails to communicate. His own actors, especially Nathalie Richard and Bulle Ogier, give thoughtful, nuanced performances. But in Maggie Cheung he reaches for the "perfect beauty" of an old-fashioned star to give his work the light touch and the unruly vitality of commercial filmmaking. In *Irma Vep*, the *cinéaste's* movie, once the burial ground of a thousand in-jokes, deftly transcends itself.

Leigh, von Trier, and Assayas have one thing in common. They see the classical forms of well-made storytelling as stagey, artificial, and played out. Instead, they lay siege to their characters as if they were making documentaries about them. How close they are to actual documentary can be gauged from Egon Humer's highly effective *Emigration, N.Y.: The Story of an Expulsion*, which explores the journey that took twelve Jews from Hitler's Vienna to a new life in New York. (One of them, who inspired the project, is Amos Vogel, a founder of the Film Festival.) Directed at an Austrian audience, twice shown on television there, the film eschews precisely those documentary techniques that attract the other directors: the tight close-ups, the grainy film stock, the wobbly camera that tries to imitate the nervous movement of the human eye. Because of the gravity of the subjects' testimony, the camera respects their space, keeps steadily to a middle distance, and integrates archival footage and music very sparingly. This no doubt reflects the influence of Lanzmann's *Shoah*, which avoided archival material entirely, limiting itself to contemporary settings and the living language of personal witness.

Like Lanzmann, Humer weaves his interviews together into a single historical narrative, concentrating in the first half on the inexorable pressures that drove these Jews out of Vienna, then shifting to the varied lives

they made for themselves in New York. His minimal approach is carefully designed to bring home the personal reality of the refugees to an Austrian audience. As Humer has written, “the film consciously concentrates on the statements of the interviewees and does not attempt to ‘illustrate’ or interpret what has been told. . . . A single face can tell the story of an entire life since it has been shaped by the graven traces of past experience.” Yet this is not a Holocaust film or a simple story of persecution and victimization: “It seemed important to me to show that in this group of survivors – in spite of all their experiences – we are not meeting anxiety-ridden, traumatized persons, but human beings who managed, with much readiness for self-improvement, to lead a full, successful, and satisfying life.”

Keeping his distance, Humer passes up the kind of cruel, invasive intensity that Lanzmann achieved with his barber in Tel Aviv or the mordant irony he extracted from reuniting a survivor with present-day Polish peasants. But his subjects’ stories are full of unexpected observations, feelings still fresh after more than half a century. Gertrud M. Kurth, a marvelously articulate woman in her nineties, remembers her shock at how she was hated in the country she grew up in: “I must have done something dirty.” Frank Grad, who became a law professor at Columbia, observes how “emigration robbed us of our self-confidence. We were never the same people we were before.” Others remember how little they wanted to be seen as German refugees, how much “you wanted to assimilate, to become an American as quickly as possible.” They recall their survivor guilt, or their terrible unease whenever they return to Vienna. In the most restrained fashion imaginable, in a country still armored in denial, Humer has crafted a vital piece of social history in starkly personal terms.

Where *Emigration*, N. Y. is spare and riveting, Emir Kusturica’s *Underground* is excessive in every way. In loud, circus-like fashion, it traces the violent break-up of Yugoslavia back to the armed struggles under the Nazi occupation and the stifling normalcy of the Tito era. Instead of peeling back history to the fates of its characters, it inflates individuals into mythic types. It draws a cartoonish Brechtian sketch of two drunken partisans and the woman they both love. One of them, Marko, is a poet who becomes an *apparatchik* in the postwar regime, living off the glory and martyrdom of the Resistance, which he freely fictionalizes. Meanwhile, he keeps his friend Blacky – a burly working-class hero – underground, in a cocoon of unreality where the war seems never to have ended. Both men are ripe for the carnage that will break out again more than four decades later. When Blacky finally emerges from his underground den, he encounters a film crew shooting a propaganda movie about his legendary exploits and heroic “death” – more evidence that the war goes on.

Kusturica brilliantly exposes the incendiary tissue of lies and myths that began with the war, were embalmed during the Tito era, and exploded again when the Communist dictatorship foundered. To Kusturica, the recent history of Yugoslavia defies the imagination, so he borrows freely from Brecht and Fellini, from Surrealism and Expressionism, to try to do justice to it. The film is so boisterous and noisy, so free and “irresponsible” in its treatment of a painful history that, as I write, it has yet to find an American distributor, eighteen months after it won the Palme d’Or at Cannes. Exactly how powerful it was came home to me as I went directly across town from Lincoln Center to a screening of Neil Jordan’s film *Michael Collins*. Just as Kusturica traces the slaughter in Bosnia back to 1941, Jordan tracks the fratricidal divisions of Ireland to 1916, and even focuses on a similar triangle of two militant friends and a woman, played by Liam Neeson, Aidan Quinn, and Julia Roberts.

A surprisingly conventional film from the author of *The Crying Game*, *Michael Collins* gamely props up all the heroic clichés so brilliantly debunked in *Underground*. Both films project a long historical span, exploring the roots, many decades back, of conflicts that still tear their nations apart, nourished by myths they cannot let die. While the movie doesn’t exactly idealize terrorism and violence, it avoids facing up to the unpleasant fact: that Michael Collins, revolutionary turned peacemaker, is killed by the same young men he mobilized, the killers he trained, the forces he let loose. Liam Neeson gives a strong performance as Michael Collins, but it’s a Hollywood impersonation, commanding but blank to the contradictions of Collins’s career. Neeson is unable to convey what is missing from the script, as Alan Rickman somehow succeeds in doing in his droll and lethal portrayal of Collins’s great rival, Eamon de Valera.

Michael Collins epitomizes the best kind of upholstered Hollywood movie that is technically superb, visually sumptuous, dramatically shallow, and morally obtuse. Where Egon Humer gives us history as scrupulous memory and Kusturica turns history into absurdist cabaret, Jordan returns us to history as dark heroic spectacle in the old commercial vein. Without the more idiosyncratic personal visions on view each fall at the New York Film Festival, that is virtually all there would be for us to see.

FICTION

LESLIE EPSTEIN

Mr. Moto Meets the Sphinx

In the fall of 1941, when Granite Films was about to go under, Alexander Granite, the aged founder of the studio, sailed to Hamburg in a last-ditch attempt to save his company. I must have been out of my mind when I – born Laszlo Loewenstein, but known to the world as Peter Lorre – agreed to go with him. That’s how desperate I was to get out of my Granite contract, under which I had already made six Moto pictures, with a seventh, *Mr. Moto Meets the Sphinx*, upon an endless horizon. Together, we hoped to persuade Magdalena Mezaray, who had been one of the studio’s great stars, to break her relations with the leader of the Reich and return with us to California. Hitler himself had promised an interview, but had kept us cooling our heels for over a week in Berlin. The excuse was that the Führer was directing his armies from the Wolf’s Lair in East Prussia and could not leave that headquarters during the offensive. Meanwhile, Granite rested inside our hotel, while I traveled about taking pictures of various monuments and the grinning people in the streets. Then, of a sudden, and in an extraordinary gesture, Herr Hitler sent none other than Hermann Goering to bring us from the capital to Munich.

Thus it was that on the evening of September 18th we two naturalized Americans found ourselves driving in a Daimler limousine through the night-time streets along the Isar. I leaned against the window glass. No blackout here. The reflections of street lamps, of electric bulbs from store fronts, of flashing neon slithered over the waxed surface of our automobile. The plump Reichsmarschall in the front seat seemed to be reading my mind. “You see our gay lights? When the RAF bombs by day and by night? Might I be forgiven for thinking they are a personal tribute? A necklace, perhaps, or a decoration to be worn alongside my *Verdienstkreuz*? Please report back to the important men in America that our people are fearless. They know my Luftwaffe will protect them.”

Neither Granite nor I said a word. Goering, from deep in his throat, gave a chuckle. “If your Roosevelt after all succeeds in drawing us into war, do you think New York City will be as brave? Eh? Do not believe it!

Even with the ocean on one side and a continent on the other, the Broadway lights, the lights in the windows of the skyscrapers and on the speeding taxis – all will be extinguished. Well, that would be at least one happy result of the war: all those cosmopolitans, eh, the sophisticates, will get to bed at a decent hour.”

Now Alexander Granite leaned forward to look at the bright lights through his rolled-up window. “What’s that? That theater? Der Volkspalast? The People’s Theater. Is that a joke? This was the Montezuma. It had a what-do-you-call-it? – an Aztec design.” The old man struck his cane, to little effect, upon the plush carpet of the floor. “You. Driver. Take us to Briennerstrasse. *Schnellstens, zum Excelsior Kino!*”

The driver of the limousine, a youth, an air cadet, did not react. Then Goering, in the passenger seat, made a nearly imperceptible movement of the head. The Daimler leapt forward, raced through two blocks, and swung left at the next intersection. Granite peered eagerly through every window. His voice, high and rasping, sounded like an off-key violin. “I see it! What does it say? Kino Horst Wessel! That was the Excelsior. A great Granite house. Fifteen thousand seats. An imported Wurlitzer organ. How dare you change the names of these theaters?”

“But Herr Granite,” said Goering, “you sold them to us yourself. Have you forgotten? As a down payment on the agreement we shall conclude tonight.”

It was true. And now the studio was going to relinquish the remainder of the Granite properties – the theater chains in the rest of Germany and Belgium and France, a sound stage in Antwerp, and offices throughout occupied Europe: all of this in exchange for Magdalena Mezaray and a symbolic three thousand marks. No wonder Hitler had been so eager to please us, two sons of Israel, not only allowing us into the Reich, but providing such a remarkable escort for the last leg of our journey. On the other hand, so Moto mused, why had he refused to meet with us? Was it really because he couldn’t leave Wolfsschanze at a crucial stage in the war? Then why, on this very night, had he suddenly agreed to come to Munich? Was he to abandon one hundred and twenty divisions to settle the fate of a middle-aged actress?

“Look!” cried Granite. “Look, Loewenstein. Am I seeing things? Is it a mirage?”

I leaned over, so as to peer through Granite’s side window. The good people of Munich were lined up under the dazzling Horst Wessel marquee. The blinking lights spelled out the title, *Liebe auf den Ersten Blick*. I followed the sequence of bulbs that led me, as surely as parallel landing lights would guide the Reichsmarschall on a foggy night, to the names of the stars.

“No, Mr. Granite,” I responded. “This is not a mirage.”

EMIL JANNINGS flashed on and off. Beside it, the name of his costar: MAGDALENA MEZARAY.

Ten minutes later the limousine moved slowly down the Prinz-regentenstrasse, with its mall of dark poplars and lindens, and came to a stop in front of number 16. Party Headquarters. On the top floor, der Führer Residenz. A squad of SS, all in black, stood guard at the curbstone and on either side of the double doors. A corporal, a Rottenführer, opened the limousine for Goering. No one opened the door in the rear. I got out on my own and, moving about the automobile, pulled Granite – how thin his arms, his bones! – from the frame. Our little party of Jews and Gentiles started toward the entrance. Suddenly I heard a far-off voice. It seemed to be drifting down from above. It wasn’t speaking so much as – could this be possible? – sobbing. The others, including the black-shirted SS, heard it too. Everyone froze. Then someone, it was the cadet – hardly more than a boy – heaved a sigh. “*Ach*,” he said. “The poor Führer.”

Goering waved us toward the double doors. “Come,” he said. “Why such sad faces? Today we have had a great victory. Yes, at Kiev!”

Granite hesitated. “But what was that noise? That wailing? The boy said it was the Führer.”

Goering: “You are mistaken. Do you see the cornice of the building? There the wind whistles by. It makes this mournful sound.”

Ahead, both doors sprang open, tripped by an electrical circuit. The Germans started forward. It occurred to me that with their slow gait, their grim expressions, they could have been pallbearers in a funeral procession. And that weeping, that unearthly moan: it might have been the sobbing of the mourners. One thing was certain, it was not the wind. There was no disguising this pitiful wail that floated down from the eaves; rising and falling, now full-voiced, now fading, it was the echo of the rant and roar that the whole world had heard on the shortwave bands of their radios.

Inside the building a marble lobby, high-ceilinged and austere, took up much of the ground floor. I realized at once that this is where we were to conclude our business. Two tables had been set up opposite each other, beneath red and black banners. On one were the agreements to be signed. The other was laden with food. The skull-like Goebbels already stood at the latter, along with Günsche, Hitler’s personal adjutant. Goering walked over. That left Granite and me by ourselves, not far from the smooth soapstone of the staircase. The atmosphere about us remained hushed and funereal. The only sound was the click of the boots of the SS men as they moved across the polished stone floor.

Then everyone stiffened. There was a new sound, a whirring, followed by a soft thud and a clank. Someone shouted *Heil Hitler*, and the Germans

raised their right arms. Hitler himself stepped out of the tiny box of an elevator. He took the salute in his usual fashion, his palm bent womanishly backward, as if submitting to the invisible shock waves hurled toward him by the upright limbs. Even from across the room I was struck by the contrast between the Führer's face, which was animated, the muscles twitching, the mouth chewing on the lips; and the eyes, never once blinking, the whites reddened, as if caught in a flashlamp's glare.

Goering stepped from the crowd at the table. "*Mein Führer*, may I be the first to congratulate you on our victory. No one can doubt that it represents the turning point of the war."

"What?" said Hitler, looking from his air chief to the Minister of Propaganda. "Have we released the news from Kiev to the public?"

"No need to worry about our American guests," Goebbels responded. "Tomorrow our triumph will be the headline in *The New York Times*."

Hitler: "And the day after tomorrow, I promise you, those headlines will be even bigger. We have swept past Kiev to surround an army of four hundred and fifty thousand men. As we speak they are in the process of surrender. The battle for the Crimea has been won."

Goering: "Not just the Crimea. On this day we have saved the civilization of the West."

Hitler turned. He looked directly past us, or through us, as if we did not exist. Yet it was plain that we were the subject of his next words. "We have present here two American Jews. I hope they appreciate how extraordinary this is. It has been allowed only at the request of Mr. Hearst and of Herr Lindbergh. Those are farsighted men. They understand that our victory today has been won not only for Germany but also for the United States."

Goering beamed. His chest puffed out. "I have today spoken by telephone to Lindbergh. In the opinion of my colleague of the air it has now been demonstrated that the armies of the Reich, supported by the Luftwaffe, cannot be overcome – I will put his words into exact English: *by any conceivable combination of forces*. Of course he means by that that the chance of war between our great nations has grown inconceivably remote."

"For such a figure," added Hitler, "I will meet with these two Jews. I do not hide the fact that I admire Herr Lindbergh as much as any man in the world. Any man! His was the single most courageous act of our times. I declare here, before all my old fellow fighters: it was from him I learned the lesson of boldness. Yes, and of acting, when conditions called for it, entirely alone. There is much he and I have in common. Who else, in all the world, has known such terrible loneliness at a moment of crisis?"

Goering: "But our dear Führer knows he will never be alone. His old-

est comrades will always stand with him.”

I was amazed at the transformation that now came over the German leader. His face grew as white as the creamy staircase, and his voice, when he spoke, emerged in a strangled whisper. “Not alone? Herr Goering, have you gone mad? Do you know what day this is? A day on which, whatever the difficulties, I have always returned to München.”

Goebbels spoke soothingly: “We feel ourselves, *mein Führer*, what you have lost. None of us have forgotten this anniversary and —”

But the Führer was not done with the hapless Goering. “There is much, too, that *I* have not forgotten. Didn’t the Reichsmarschall des Grossdeutschen Reiches promise me that the Messerschmitt 109 would make short work of the RAF defenses? Let us pray that we do not look back upon that failure of the Luftwaffe as the *true* turning point of the war.”

“Might I say to the Führer, the victory we are celebrating today would not have been possible without the air cover of the Messerschmitt and the tactical support of our Stuka dive-bombers.”

“*Celebrating!* We are not here to have a celebration! Don’t you understand? You say you are my oldest friend. You claim to have fought by my side. And still you know nothing of my inner life. I have just come from upstairs. From that sacred room. I have been weeping. Look! My tunic! Soaked with my tears. Oh, Goebbels! Has it been ten years? Ten years!”

Goebbels, glancing at his watch: “Almost to the hour.”

Goering took the risk of saying, “A beautiful young woman. A noble spirit.”

Hitler put his hand to his chest: “On that night, at that moment, my heart stopped beating. Tell me: why is it beating now? It is a traitor! Look at you, all of you: you obey me. All of Germany obeys me. Only my own heart ignores my commands.”

Goebbels: “On such a night, at this anniversary, naturally you have such feelings.”

“Yes, I am made of flesh. I do have feelings. They are deep, deep within. But do you think I am swept away by my emotions? I assure you I am not some woman who weeps at the cinema. I am not a boy who is overcome at the death of his dog. Painful memories do not prevent me from making rational decisions. Every creative spirit has at his center a store of ice. It is from this unmeltable core, with perfect calm, that I tell you I am aware of how much, in these last ten years, has been accomplished. Already we have achieved many of our goals in Europe. But I would give all of it up, yes, in an instant, without regrets, if I could have returned to me that dear girl.”

Young Günsche, blond and beribboned, spoke feelingly: “You must not say such things, *mein Führer*. What happened in that room was God’s

will. Nothing could prevent it. Such things are not in our power.”

“*Kameraden!* None of you can know how much I suffer. Before my eyes I see that gay smile. I hear the mountain brook of that laughter. Geli! Geli! Not once did I have to beg her. Never did I have to grovel. She did for me, from the goodness of her heart, what others did because of promises, because of fear.”

The SS adjutant looked as if he might break into tears. “And so, too, all that we have attained has also been according to God’s will. You have no choice but to continue. You have been chosen by destiny. Nothing can be undone. Our only direction is forward!”

“Well said, Günsche,” Goering declared. “The greater part of the task still awaits us. Not just in Europe. We shall be victorious on every continent.”

“Ah! Ah!” Hitler exclaimed, peering upward at either the gilded ceiling or through it, beyond it, to the evening sky. “With my revolver! In my apartment!”

At these words a coldness came over my heart, as if some cruel person had plunged it, like an unwanted tabby, into a pail of frozen water. How could the leaders of the Reich allow me and Granite to overhear such remarks? Even worse, how could they allow us to leave the Reich once they had done so? They would have to shoot both of us, the way criminals must eliminate whoever has blundered across their crime. And even if we somehow managed to escape, how could Magda go with us? Hadn’t she, like Geli, been Hitler’s mistress? That meant that, like his niece and every other woman who had shared his secrets, she must take, or seem to take, her own life.

Now I, like Herr Hitler, stared up toward the ceiling, where a great chandelier blazed above us. Would that, like the even grander fixture in *Mysterious Mr. Moto*, it might crash down upon us, while I stood, in my cool white linen, calmly chatting nearby. *Auf Wiedersehen* to the leaders of the Reich! Alas: the chandelier hung as immutable as the candelabrae of the heavens. The only thing that changed was the Führer’s expression. He looked toward his visitors with – was that a wink? Beneath the brush of the moustache, was that a hint of a smile? Goebbels led him to where Granite and I were standing. None of us shook hands. But when the minister mentioned the name of the founder of Granite Films, Hitler looked him directly in the eye.

“I understand from Goebbels that you wish to see me about your properties in the Greater Reich.”

“We have come, Herr Reichsführer, to make an arrangement concerning our assets. The minister has informed us that this must be done with you in person.”

"I want to make it absolutely clear that you have been allowed into this room solely as a favor to Herr Lindbergh."

"We are grateful for his assistance."

Here Goebbels turned the old man toward the table and its documents. "There is no reason for delay. If you will sit we can sign the contracts."

But Granite would not be budged. He kept his gaze upon the Führer. "Just one minute. I'm sure you can wait that long, since you are going to get our holdings at such a reasonable price."

"Do you think that is of the least concern to our nation? A reasonable price? The Third Reich does not haggle in the bazaar."

"The total sum," Goebbels interjected, "has been set at three thousand marks."

From ten feet away, Goering laughed. "Tonight the Kino Horst Wessel will take in three times that amount!"

"The board of Granite Films is aware that we are offering the Third Reich a gift."

"And what choice have you?" Herr Hitler asked. "If you resist we shall seize all the theaters. It is our moral duty to do so. We cannot allow the good German people to be subjected to filth and lying propaganda. An entire generation has grown up with sirens and seductresses. With Chicago gangsters. With Negro music. We do not permit sexual relations between the races in the Third Reich. How then could we turn our eyes away from a more insidious kind of miscegenation? Through these images and sounds Africa and the Orient penetrate the mind of the folk. We can deal with degeneracy when we see it in our streets. But the soul, when it is polluted with foreign ideas, is harder to cleanse."

Goebbels: "The German film industry now corresponds to the same ideals one sees in all German art. The screen images spring from the soil and from the deepest yearnings of the folk."

To my horror, I heard myself saying, "I saw that tonight with my own eyes. *Liebe auf den Ersten Blick*, with Mezaray and Jannings."

"If I am not mistaken you intend a certain mockery," Goebbels responded. "Our people are at war. You are now aware they have just won a victory that will turn back the Asiatic tide. If each day they willingly shoulder such heroic burdens, we cannot deny their wish for relaxation and diversion at night."

Goering: "Herr Loewenstein does not mention that we also drove by Der Volkspalast. Did he not see what is playing there? If not I can tell him that it is a film that has brought enlightenment to the people in every city of the Reich. It is a useful corrective to the false notions spread by the Hollywood product. It is a new version of *Jew Süß*."

"The lines," said I, "were longer at *Liebe auf den Ersten Blick*."

Hitler turned to his Minister of Propaganda. "Goebbels, tell me: *Der Volkspalast*. Wasn't that the old Montezuma? Yes, I remember. That is precisely my point. Even before the film could be shown, the motifs of these theaters – primitive Aztecs, Egyptian pyramids, Chinese temples: by suggestion they were undermining the racial purity of our Thousand Year Reich."

"Those pyramids," I, or the devil who had seized my tongue, replied, "have lasted longer than one thousand years."

Granite leaned forward on his cane, as if without it he might topple over. What surprised me was the way his voice, though still high and rasping, had nonetheless assumed the confident tone of a diplomat's. "Herr Reichsführer, you mentioned that because our assets are in danger of being expropriated, the board of Granite films has no choice but to offer them to you on the most generous terms."

"It is the only possible course."

"That is not the case. Not exactly. My government has the means to retaliate. Secretary Morgenthau has told me that you have the right to confiscate our property, but that German assets worth tens of millions of dollars might be seized unless we were offered fair compensation. I mention this not to make threats or in order to bargain, but only to point out that we enter these negotiations as equals."

Here Goebbels stamped his weighted shoe on the stone. "Morgenthau! Bringing his name into the discussions can only be considered a provocation."

"I am worried," Granite continued, his little eyes still focused upon those of the Führer, "that the agreements upon this table do not reflect such a reality. They are clearly one-sided. The contracts that I will sign as an officer of Granite Films have the force of law. They will be enforced by American courts. I am to give up my theaters and offices and a functioning studio. How can I know that what we ask for in return will in fact be forthcoming?"

Goering responded with what sounded like genuine shock. "Are you questioning the word of the leader of the Reich? You shall have your three thousand pieces of silver."

Granite: "And what of Magdalena Mezaray? Herr Goebbels gave me his guarantee that she will be permitted to accompany us to the United States."

Goebbels put his hand over his hair, which seemed to leave it even slicker than before. "We do not hold people against their will. Such a choice is entirely hers."

At those words I could not help myself from blurting out, "Then she

agrees? She will come? I have her ticket.”

Through this exchange Hitler had stood, rocking on his heels, with one hand grasping his wrist. At last he blinked, slowly. When his eyes opened, they bulged wider than before. “Why are you here? What is it you and Morgenthau are after? And why on this day of all days? Do you expect to find me drunk on my own emotion? On my memories of poor Geli? Or do you have some idea of rescuing Fräulein Mezaray from some similar fate? You want a melodrama, is that it? To snatch her from the jaws of death! Perhaps, instead of the news of the victory at Kiev, you would prefer to see those headlines in your gutter press.”

Once more I felt the ice crystals stabbing at my chest. It was as if the master of the Reich had the ability to read my very thoughts. “Mr. Granite,” I said, turning to my traveling companion. “Why don’t you tell him? We have no such ideas. We came here on business. We are nothing but businessmen.”

Now the Führer’s cheek had begun to twitch, like the flanks of a horse. His lower lip was slick with spittle. “Do you dare to imagine,” he continued, as though he had not heard anything I’d said, “that I have forgotten the words of our enemies? Ten years have passed and I have not forgotten! The stories on the radio. The stories in the press. That Herr Hitler killed his own niece, his own darling Geli! Yes, that he broke her nose! Covered her with bruises! And broke a few ribs for her, too! Worse! The stories were worse! That she killed herself because some Jew, an art teacher from Linz, had made her pregnant or – this was fantastic, sheer delusion and depravity: *Herr Hitler, we have heard, was the father of her unborn child.*”

Goering: “To speak that way about a love that was pure! Pure and spotless! About an angel!”

Goebbels: “We shut their mouths for them. We smashed their presses.”

Goering: “We haven’t finished yet. There is more smashing to do.”

Here was a medical miracle: even though my internal temperature had dropped to zero, I had broken into a sweat. “I don’t understand such talk. Why are you making these threats? We came here in good faith. We want to do business.”

Here Hitler pointed his finger at Granite and let out a terrible shriek: “*Then why doesn’t he agree to sign?*”

Now the adjutant, Günsche, stepped forward and clicked his heels together. “Good faith, did you say? Strictly business? I am not so certain. *Mein Führer*, it is my duty to report that reliable witnesses have observed this Jew as he was taking photographs in restricted areas of Berlin.”

For the first time Hitler seemed to become aware of my existence.

His eyes, heretofore wide and white, now narrowed to glittering slits. "Can this be true?"

"I took photographs. I admit it. Of cultural monuments. Of tourist attractions."

Günsche: "There were also photographs of the abandoned synagogues and of our German folk. Also of strategic intersections and an electrical substation. We have discovered the prints hidden in his luggage. We have been forced to conclude we may be dealing here with an adventurer, or more likely a spy."

"You searched my luggage? But that is outrageous! By what right was that done? Who gave such orders? Besides, I took no pictures of synagogues. This is a complete misunderstanding." So speaking, I backed away from the others, toward the staircase. There was, in the back of my brain, a whirring sound, a kind of whine – no, not in my brain, from somewhere in the building.

Goebbels: "Seize the Jew. He might have a weapon."

"What Jew? Ha-ha. I am a practitioner of judo, not Judaism. Here is Moto. Ally from Japan!"

Hitler went pale. "A weapon? We can't take chances. What if they want to harm Fräulein Mezaray? And put the blame on me. I know these tricks! Anything to create a scandal. Search him!"

Günsche made a motion with his hand. Three of the SS men stepped forward.

"Stop!" The order, amazingly enough, came from Alexander Granite. "You forget that I know a show when I see it. This has all been an act, the screaming, the screeching, the threats. It's all been staged because you want my business. All right. You can have it. Every Granite property left in Europe. Give me the pen. The paper. I will sign."

With that the old man limped to the table and pulled out a chair. Goebbels, his own limp disguised by his built-up shoe, moved quickly to sit down beside him. He took an ebony pen from its holder and signed in three places. Then, while the small crowd gathered around, he handed the instrument to the founder of Granite Films.

* * *

While the Germans were busy watching the nonagenarian put down his name in triplicate, I managed to dart unnoticed up the stone staircase. Not surprisingly, perhaps, I could not escape the sensation that I had played this part before. Not once, a hundred times. Jewel thieves, kidnappers, gamblers, assassins: Mr. Moto knew how to foil them all. The trick, of course, was to remain both calmer and cleverer than any such villain: mental

jujitsu, that's what I needed, the ability to remain detached, floating in nonchalance above the foe. Alas, it was just that Asian aplomb that deserted me now. At any second I felt that my chilled heart would burst, the way a bottle of milk will explode in the freezing compartment of a refrigerator. My breath, vibrating in my chest, sounded like the seeds in a gourd shaken by Xavier Cugat. As I stumbled on, past the first storey, up to the second, the whirring sound, the whining, continued to echo in my ears. Suddenly I recognized it. The machinery of Hitler's elevator!

With a groan I pulled myself down the hallway, past one shut door after another, until I came to the metal portal set into the grillwork of the shaft. There was a buzzer next to the handle. On impulse I pressed it. There was no answering bell. Through the mesh of the screen I could see the steel cables tremble with exertion. There, well below me, the cage itself, swishing and sighing, was on the rise. I went back to the door and peered through the round metal porthole, which, it turned out, matched an identical window on the lift itself. Thus, for a half second, I could look into the dimly lit interior as unhesitatingly it glided by. That was enough time for me to see that the metal box was occupied. I thought I had seen a woman. I thought she had been wearing a veil.

Up, up, up went the elevator, until even the dangling ropes underneath it disappeared from view. At the same time the whirl of the engine high above also ceased: not because the elevator had stopped – on the contrary, I soon saw that it was once more descending; but because the tramp-tramp-tramp of the jackboots upon the soft stone of the stairs drowned it out. A search party! The SS! Panting now, I staggered back to the buzzer and jammed my finger against it. I pressed my bug-eyed face to the window. But the cage, with its mysterious occupant – not so mysterious; it must be Magda – flickered for an instant, porthole to porthole, and then sank out of sight.

What could I do? The ring of the boots on the stairway was louder. They were on the first landing; they were marching to the second. With my finger, it was numb now and tingling, I signaled the lift yet again. In due time the taut cable shuddered, stopped, and hauled itself upward. How long had Magda been locked within this cage, rising, descending, rising once more? For an instant I thought of something I'd read somewhere, or seen in a movie: a bird, not a hummingbird, but more flamboyant – bird of paradise? – that died when it came to rest. Poor Magda! She was no less frightened than I of the SS.

Once more I pressed my man-in-the-moon face against the circle of the window. All hope was draining away. Two tiny blades, that's what it felt like, were sawing at my wrists. The pins and needles had reached as far as my toes. My eyelids, made from asbestos, fell over my eyes.

There was a clack, a click, then something was pushing on my chest – not from the inside, but from without. It was the door! The elevator had stopped! With the last of my strength I stumbled inside. Both doors closed behind me.

“Magda! Darling! I am dying from a heart attack!”

The little room was warm and airless. A lamp bulb produced very few watts in the shade overhead. For a moment the two of us, actor and actress, hung motionless in space. She stared blankly, invisible behind her dotted veil. I leaned against the wall, panting, my tongue lolling from my open mouth. Finally, with an effort, I raised both hands and began to grope at my breast, ripping the buttons off my camel-hair jacket, tearing open the silk shirt with the monogram, *PL*, on the pocket, and digging into the stuff of my undershirt, as if I meant to claw through the flesh itself to get at my thudding heart. But it wasn’t my heart I was after. From next to my skin I peeled away a photo of what had been an Orthodox temple. “Please, Magda. Take it. Hide it. You will save my life.”

But Magda, if indeed it were she, turned her back. She reached for the slick brass handle of the controls and pulled it towards her. We rose.

The photograph dropped from my fingers. My head drooped on my neck, as if weighed down by the force of acceleration. We climbed to the top floor, the Führer floor, and halted. For a moment neither one of us moved. I remained slumped against the wall, panting for breath. She stood, swaying, her grip on the protruding lever. Then, with a gasp, she lurched against the handle, and we began to slide down the shaft.

My eyes were fixed on the floor of the cage, where the photo lay face up in black and white. “Magda,” I began. “We have to get out of here. Let’s stop at the first floor, all right? We’ll walk right by them. I’m only asking one thing. A little favor. Take the picture. Put it in your purse. They won’t search you. That would be an insult to Hitler. He trusts you. Maybe he fears you. You are the one who knows his secrets. Or put it in your dress. They found the other photos. This is the only one left.”

One by one, like the snap of a shutter, the floors slipped by the port-hole lens. Above us, in the rafters, or on the rooftop, the cable unrolled with a humming sound from its spool. Magdalena made no response. She stood, shadowy in the feeble light, pressing against the controls.

“Have they told you why we are here? It’s to take you back to America. Everything has been arranged. We have a kind of a contract. We’ll take a steamer from Vichy France. Won’t you turn around? Won’t you look at me? Everyone said you wouldn’t come back if I didn’t ask you. Am I so irresistible? You know I missed you, Magda. I sent letters but the letters came back. Such dark thoughts I had! Old Granite is with me. You’ll save Granite Films. We can make a movie about this whole adven-

ture. There are a lot of pictures these days about spies and adventurers and refugees. I made one myself. *Mr. Moto's Last Warning*. It's set in Egypt. There's a spy for Germany there, it's George Sanders, and he wants to launch a sneak attack on the French fleet and blame it on England. An antique dealer discovers the plot; only it isn't an antique dealer, it's Mr. Moto. At the last minute, five fathoms down, he foils the Germans by setting off the charges prematurely. Only we couldn't say Germany. Not the actual word. We said, *your employer* and *the foreign power* and things like that. I don't suppose you saw it? No, no – they wouldn't allow it in Berlin.

"You won't speak? Not to your old friend? Your lamb? Listen, love, if you come with me Granite will release me from the Moto contract. Those pictures are killing me! The glasses, the brillianteen, the cemented teeth! *Ah, so! Ah, so! Ah, so!* Magda, I have a question. In Berlin, in Munich, I think it's the same throughout Europe: Where are the Jews?"

We had reached the ground floor. Magda sighed. I stood upright and pulled on the inner door. It did not open. I looked round at my companion. Her back was still turned. She seemed to be shuddering. "Aren't we going to go out?" I asked her. Apparently not. With a groan she threw herself upon the lever and once again, inexplicably, we started to rise.

"Magda, I don't understand this. Are we going to go up and down all night? There's no air here. We'll suffocate. After the last Moto film I thought I wouldn't have to do another. They actually lent me out to Warners. Oh, what joy! I was a man out of prison! Light! Air! The songs of the birds! But now I've got to go back to Granite. I've been on my knees praying there would be a war with Japan. That will be the end of my bondage. Goodbye to the gumshoe. Under water! With my hands tied! Inside a sack! Can you imagine it? Like a Japanese Houdini. And meanwhile the French fleet with all those French sailors on board was nearing the harbor. I was the only person in the world who could save them. *Moto! Moto! Do something! A miracle, Mr. Moto!*"

Still no answer. No response of any kind. Was she deaf? A horrible thought: she'd been tortured! She'd lost her mind! "Magda, if you want me to, if it's your wish, I will also fall on my knees. I'll pray to you. These German people! Why are they smiling? Why so happy? Is it the war? Winning the war? No, no, no, no. *Excuse, please: Mr. Moto discover easy answer!* They have the Jews' apartments. They have the Jews' jobs. Don't you see? They've got the whole city to themselves! It's like a German holiday!"

I broke off, but only to gulp, from the stagnant interior, a breath of air. I felt now that I dare not stop, as if the string of my words was, together with the strands in the cable, the only thing that kept us aloft.

"That photograph. Do you know what it is? It's the evidence of a

crime! Help me! You have to help me! Oh, in case you are wondering how I escaped, I had a steel file in my hand. The audience saw it in close-up. I cut through the ropes. I slashed through the sack. Then I swam to George Sanders, who was waiting for the signal to blow up the fleet. I attacked him with jujitsu, with judo. Right on the chin! If only this were a picture. In pictures I'm fearless. Alas, this is real life. Magda! Do you know what real life is full of? Doubts! And fears! Why did the Germans let me take those pictures? Why was I allowed into Germany at all? Did they want to let me in on their secret? What do you think? Is it an excuse to kill me? The way they killed that girl? That Geli? We used a water tank. The whole picture was shot on the lot. The camels and fezzes and the streets of Port Said. But there was no extra in the water. That was me. With my buck teeth, like a beaver. With my Wildroot hair."

The next time up we didn't go to the top but stopped at the fifth floor, one beneath the Führer's. Moreover, when we descended we didn't reach the bottom, but halted at the second. And when we rose again we only went as far as the fourth. It had finally begun to dawn upon me what was occurring less than a yard from where I stood. I turned away my eyes. I put out my arms, so as to brace myself against the walls of the lift, which, from Magdalena's exertions, had started to rock. Now I didn't allow myself the least of pauses; if I did so there was no way to avoid hearing the way she gasped with pleasure as she drew in her breath.

"Maybe I'm lying about my motives. Maybe I'm not so high-minded. I might be fooling myself, I admit it. Listen, Magda. If I have to do another Moto it will kill me. If it doesn't kill me I'll commit hara-kiri. This summer I finished my work in Huston's new picture. The remake of *Maltese Falcon*. We open next month in New York. I'm going to get raves. I'm going to be offered a Warner's contract. It's the way out of the sack! Out of the elevator! You've simply got to help me! You've got to come back! I've seen the script they'll give me if you don't. *Mr. Moto Meets the Sphinx*. Oh, my God. My God. Back to Egypt! People are dying from a new kind of plague, of poison, only it's an old kind, and – can you believe this? – the antidote is buried inside the Pyramid of Cheops! They want me to take a time machine so that I can learn the secret formula from the Pharaoh himself. Meanwhile here we are in the twentieth century in the middle of a tragedy. What's going to happen in the city of Kiev? It's surrounded. It's overrun. They will slaughter tens of thousands of Jews. If they're going to have a time machine, why do I have to go back to the Fourth Dynasty, for pity's sake? Let Moto travel to the 1880s, as a peddler or a gardener or a household servant. He's good at that. A master of disguises! *Time for your tea, honorable Mister Schickelgruber*. Or, *How does the honorable lady wish me to prepare her pork sausage, her pork dumplings, her pig's feet, her bacon?*

Mr. Moto knows herbs. He knows poisons. Just a pinch. Merely a drop. He won't have to kill his victims. He'll make these Austrians sterile. *Mr. Moto and the Miscarriage*. The whole course of history will be changed. Instead, I'm supposed to fly back thousands of years and answer the riddle of the Sphinx. You'll see. You'll see, Magda. I'll put a sword into my stomach. *Banzai!*"

The little cage which enclosed us was no longer traveling between the floors. At most we went up a few inches and, an instant later, a few inches down. A gentleman, an Old-Worlder, this Herr Laszlo Loewenstein: I turned round completely and, as is the world-wide custom of those in elevators, faced the interlocked door. I was too shocked to say another word. Behind me Magda panted. She groaned. The smell of her sex filled the little room. Suddenly the lift stopped rocking. The machinery above us fell silent. Ashamed, abashed, I looked down at my hands. The light from the light bulb fell upon them, like a dusting of make-up, turning the skin as yellow as that of the agent of the International Police.

"All right, Peter," said Magda, in the husky voice familiar to millions. "It's over. You can turn around."

I did as requested. She was crouched on the floor. She had lifted her pillbox hat, and with it the veil, from her flowing hair, which was longer, and darker, than I had ever seen it before. Her face, I thought, was the same, with the thin, arched, penciled brows, the high cheekbones and the full lower lip, after everything still like that of a pouting child's. The cheeks were even deeper, hollower than ever, an effect, perhaps, of the overhead illumination. Her eyes, so deep-set, also seemed darker, blacker, but that might have been caused by the dilation of her pupils in the inadequate light. Faintly she smiled, probably because she had caught me in the act of doing what everyone did at first impulse: glancing toward her legs. But they were folded beneath her, out of sight.

"Don't be upset, little lamb. It's over. I'm calm. I'm not troubled. Not tortured. No victim."

"Magda. Darling Magda. I wish I were not here. It would be better if I hadn't seen this. If I didn't exist."

The actress gave a laugh, surprisingly light, almost carefree. "This? It's nothing, lambie. I want you to understand. You wonder why I left Hollywood? My contract at Granite? Do you think I felt any different about my work than you feel about yours? I too wanted to commit harakiri. The difference between us is that I have already done so. You have heard the rumors about meeting *him* in Vienna? The rumors are all true. I was invited to his hotel after the Anschluss. We'd met before — years ago. Then he was shy. A flush on his neck. Looking past me, over my shoulder. Of course then he was not then the world's master. In the Hotel

Metropol, like here, he had the top floor. It was the bridal suite."

I threw my hands over my ears. "I don't want to hear it! You have to forget about it. Don't you know about Geli? What they did to her? With Hitler's own pistol!"

"Then don't listen, lamb. Or don't remember what you hear. Are you afraid they will torture you for information? Or torture me? If they pierce me with burning wires I'll tell them that Magda does not know anything about the Jews. She also doesn't know why she did what she did in the hotel in Vienna – or after Vienna, or whether she would do it again if she had the chance. The question I ask myself is, was all of it at bottom a kind of flattery? I knew he was the most powerful man in the world. But with me he was powerless. He was a beggar. I wish I could tell you it was torture. Or a humiliation. Or that it wasn't me. Do you understand? That I had abstracted myself, made myself into a machine without a soul, a body without a mind; or had turned myself into another person, the way I do before the camera. But it is pointless to pretend that I was anyone else but Magdalena Mezaray, the name I was born with, and that when he lay under me, like a baby, really, naked and helpless, wailing, covered with slime, I felt anything other than what he does when, with the might of his armies, he straddles the world."

"Magda, I –"

"Shhh. Lambkins, hush. I know what you are too dear a lamb to ask: why didn't I feel, instead of that glory, simple human revulsion? I did. But not until later, months later, when he started to use a piece of glass. It was a coffee table. I squatted on top. He was beneath with his bulging eyes. That was when I felt the disgust. Waves of it. And nausea. Because now that he was to be clean and pure, I felt covered with dirt. The only part of him I could bear to look at was his moustache, because it was a reminder, like a smudge of filth. Oh, these English words: *the pain of glass*! It shattered me, lambie. I'd lost him. That's what happened to that little girl, Geli: she'd lost him, too. *Liebe auf den Ersten Blick*? I made that to get back my power. I wanted to be a giant, a giantess, sixty feet high on the screen, with an audience of pygmies writhing beneath me. A colossus! A star! That's what I'd had before. The knowledge that at any one moment, in all the capital cities of the world, men were gazing at me. Devouring me with their eyes. I used to think of them: crowds of men, armies of men, *my* armies, with their pale white faces. There they are, turned like sunflowers – or moonflowers, if such a thing is possible – to the light of the illuminated screen. I would feel the heat of their breathing. I would hear their soft moans. Ah! To imagine the pleasure I gave them, those uncountable millions, as they touched themselves in the dark."

I did nothing. I do not think, through the whole of that speech, I took

a single breath.

"But it was too late. My moment has passed. Does he care? He is indifferent. He is gone. So now, my lamb, you know why I came to this little room. No? Can't you guess? Of course you can guess! Because only a half hour ago his hand – " and here she indicated the cool metal lever of the controls: "was on this piece of brass."

* * *

Mission to Munich: who would have thought, at such a terrible moment, it would end in success? Certainly the last thing I imagined was that Magdalena would pick up the incriminating photograph and slip it, as had been requested, under her bodice; or that the two of us would have been able to walk unmolested across the polished stone lobby of 16 Prinzregentenstrasse and make our way to the steamer that was waiting at Marseille. Indeed, immediately after Magda had completed her heart-stopping confession, I was sure that she would not even attempt to depart the Third Reich. For a another brief moment the two of us remained in that stifling cabin, like animals caught in an animal trap; while on the stairways, and down the corridors of the six-story building, the sound of the jackboots grew steadily louder. Then the former Loewenstein-Lorre, the lambkin, watched as a single tear furrowed through the pancake powder on Magda's cheek. A copycat tear wobbled down the side of my nose.

"Listen, lambie, don't misunderstand me. I am not weeping. You must not either. Look. A blink of the eye. The tear is gone."

And so it was. That's when Magdalena seized the photograph and slipped it under her blouse. Then we walked, with old man Granite beside us, unmolested from the building. Four days later we sailed away. Even then Moto was wary. All the way through the Mediterranean, past Gibraltar, and across the broad Atlantic I was certain as certain could be that each moment would be my last. By day I scoured the horizon for the periscope of the *U-boot* that must be following in our wake; and through the night, during my fitful and dream-filled sleep, my arms were crossed over my body, reassuringly, like the hug of a life-preserver.

POEMS

T. S. ELIOT

The Burnt Dancer

sotta la pioggia dell' aspro martiro

Within the yellow ring of flame
A black moth through the night
Caught in the circle of desire
Expiates his heedless flight
With beat of wings that do not tire
Distracted from more vital values
To golden values of the flame
What is the virtue that he shall use
In a world too strange for pride or shame?
A world too strange for praise or blame
Too strange for good or evil:
How drawn here from a distant star
For mirthless dance and silent revel

O danse mon papillon noir!

The tropic odours of your name
From Mozambique or Nicobar
Fall on the ragged teeth of flame
Like perfumed oil upon the waters
What is the secret you have brought us
Children's voices in little corners
Whimper whimper through the night
Of what disaster do you warn us
Agony nearest to delight?
Dance fast dance faster
There is no mortal disaster
The destiny that may be leaning
Toward us from your hidden star
Is grave, but not with human meaning

Editor's Note: Excerpted from *Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909-1917* by T. S. Eliot. Edited with an introduction and notes by Christopher Ricks. © 1996, Valerie Eliot. Editorial Matter and annotations © 1996, Christopher Ricks. Published by Harcourt Brace & Company.

O danse mon papillon noir!

Within the circle of my brain
The twisted dance continues.
The patient acolyte of pain,
The strong beyond our human sinews,
The singed reveller of the fire,
Caught on those horns that toss and toss,
Losing the end of his desire
Desires completion of his loss.
O strayed from whiter flames that burn not
O vagrant from a distant star
O broken guest that may return not

O danse danse mon papillon noir!

Goldfish (Essence of Summer Magazines)

I

Always the August evenings come
With preparation for the waltz
The hot verandah making room
For all the reminiscent tunes
– The *Merry Widow* and the rest –

That call, recall
So many nights and afternoons –
August, with all its faults!

And the waltzes turn, return;
The *Chocolate Soldier* assaults
The tired Sphinx of the physical.
What answer? We cannot discern.

And the waltzes turn, return,
Float and fall,
Like the cigarettes
Of our marionettes
Inconsequent, intolerable

II

Embarquement pour Cythère

Ladies, the moon is on its way!
Is everybody here?
And the sandwiches and ginger beer?
If so, let us embark –
The night is anything but dark,
Almost as clear as day.
It's utterly illogical
Our making such a start, indeed
And thinking that we must return.

Oh no! why should we not proceed
(As long as a cigarette will burn
When you light it at the evening star)
To porcelain land, what avatar
Where blue-delft-romance is the law.

Philosophy through a paper straw!

III

On every sultry afternoon
Verandah customs have the call
White flannel ceremonial
With cakes and tea
And guesses at eternal truths
Sounding the depths with a silver spoon
And dusty roses, crickets, sunlight on the sea
And all.

And should you ever hesitate
Among such charming scenes –
Essence of summer magazines –
Hesitate, and estimate
How much is simple accident
How much one knows
How much one means
Well! among many apophthegms
Here's one that goes –
Play to your conscience, through the maze
Of means and ways
And wear the crown of your ideal
Bays
And rose.

IV

Among the débris of the year
Of which the autumn takes its toll: –
Old letters, programmes, unpaid bills
Photographs, tennis shoes, and more,
Ties, postal cards, the mass that fills
The limbo of a bureau drawer –
Of which October takes its toll
Among the débris of the year
I find this headed “Barcarolle”.

“Along the wet paths of the sea
A crowd of barking waves pursue
Bearing what consequence to you
And me.
The neuropathic winds renew
Like marionettes who leave their graves
Walking the waves
Bringing the news from either Pole
Or knowledge of the fourth dimension:
“We beg to call to your attention
“Some minor problems of the soul.”

- Your seamanship is very neat
You scan the clouds, as if you knew,
Your language nautical, complete;
There's nothing left for me to do.
And while you give the wheel a twist
I gladly leave the rest to fate
And contemplate
The aged sybil in your eyes
At the four crossroads of the world
Whose oracle replies: –
“These problems seem importunate
But after all do not exist.”

Between the theoretic seas
And your assuring certainties
I have my fears:
– I am off for some Hesperides
Of street pianos and small beers!

First Caprice in North Cambridge

A street-piano, garrulous and frail;
The yellow evening flung against the panes
Of dirty windows: and the distant strains
Of children's voices, ended in a wail.

Bottles and broken glass,
Trampled mud and grass;
A heap of broken barrows;
And a crowd of tattered sparrows
Delve in the gutter with sordid patience.

Oh, these minor considerations!

Silence

Along the city streets
It is still high tide,
Yet the garrulous waves of life
Shrink and divide
With a thousand incidents
Vexed and debated:—
This is the hour for which we waited —
This is the ultimate hour
When life is justified.
The seas of experience
That were so broad and deep,
So immediate and steep,
Are suddenly still.
You may say what you will,
At such peace I am terrified.
There is nothing else beside.

LES MURRAY

The Shield-Scales Of Heraldry

Surmounting my government's high evasions
stands a barbecue of crosses and birds
tended by a kangaroo and emu
but in our courts, above the judge,
a lion and a unicorn still keep
their smaller offspring, plus a harp,
in an open prison looped with mottoes.

Coats of arms, plaster Rorschach blots,
crowned stone moths, they encrust Europe.
As God was dismissed from churches
they fluttered in and cling to the walls,
abstract comic-pages held by scrolled beasts,
or wear on the flagstones underfoot.
They pertain to an earlier Antichrist,

the one before police. Mafiose citadels
made them, states of one attended family
islanded in furrows. The oldest
are the simplest. A cross, some coins,
a stripe, a roof tree, a spur rowel,
bowstaves, a hollow-gutted lion,
and all in lucid target colours.

Under tinned heads with reveries tied on,
shields are quartered and cubed by marriage
till they are sacred campaign maps
or anatomy inside dissected mantling,
glyphs minutely clear through their one
rule, that colour must abut either
gold or silver, the non-weapon metals.

The New World doesn't blazon well –
the new world ran away from blazonry
or was sent away in chains by it –
but exceptions shine: the spread eagle
with the fireworks display on its belly
and in the thinks-ballon above its head.
And when as a half-autistic

kid in scrub paddocks vert and or
I grooved on the cloisons of pedigree
it was a vivid writing of system
that hypnotised me, beyond the obvious
euphemism of force. It was eight hundred
years of cubist art and Europe's dreamings:
the Cup, the Rose, the Ship, the Antlers.

High courage, bestial snobbery,
neither now merits ungrace from us.
They could no longer hang me,
throttling, for a rabbit sejant.
Like everyone, I would now be lord
or lady myself, and pardon me
or myself loose the coronet-necked hounds.

Now we face new people who share
attitudes only with each other,
withholding all fellowship with us,
all genial laughter. Reverse nobles
who twist us into Gorgon shapes
of an anti-heraldry, inside
their journals and never-lowered shields.

It Allows A Portrait In Line Scan At Fifteen

He retains a slight 'Martian' accent, from the years of single phrases.
He no longer hugs to disarm. It is gradually allowing him affection.
It does not allow proportion. Distress is absolute, shrieking, and runs
him at frantic speed through crashing doors.

He likes cyborgs. Their taciturn power, with his intonation.
It still runs him around the house, alone in the dark, cooing and
laughing.

He can read about soils, populations and New Zealand. On neutral topics
he's illiterate.

Arnie Schwarzenegger is an actor. He isn't a cyborg really, is he, Dad?

He lives on forty acres, with animals and trees, and used to draw it
continually.

He knows the map of Earth's fertile soils, and can draw it freehand.
He can only lie in a panicked shout *SorrySorryIdidn'tdoit!* warding off
conflict with others and himself.

When he ran away constantly it was to the greengrocers to worship
stacked fruit.

His favourite country was the Ukraine: it is nearly all deep fertile
soil.

Giggling, he climbed all over the dim Freudian psychiatrist who told
us how autism resulted from 'refrigerator' parents.

When asked to smile, he photographs a rictus-smile on his face.
 It long forbade all naturalistic films. They were Adult movies.
If they (that is, he) *are bad the police will put them in hospital.*
 He sometimes drew the farm amid Chinese or Balinese rice terraces.
 When a runaway, he made uproar in the police station, playing at
 three times adult speed.
 Only animated films were proper. Who Framed Roger Rabbit then
 authorize the rest.
 Phrases spoken to him he would take as teaching, and repeat.
 When he worshipped fruit, he screamed as if poisoned when it was fed
 to him.
 A one-word first conversation: *Blane*. — *Yes! Plane, that's right, baby! Blane.*
 He has forgotten nothing, and remembers the precise quality of
 experiences.
 It requires rulings: *Is stealing very playing up, as bad as murder?*
 He counts at a glance, not looking. And he has never been lost.
 When he ate only nuts and dried fruit, words were for dire emergencies.
 He knows all the breeds of fowls, and the counties of Ireland.
 He'd begun to talk, then returned to babble, then silence. It withdrew
 speech for years.
Is that very autistic, to play video games in the day?
 He is anger's mirror, and magnifies any near him, raging it down.
 It still won't allow him fresh fruit, or orange juice with bits in it.
 He swam in the midwinter dam at night. It had no rules about cold.
 He was terrified of thunder and finally cried as if in explanation *It —*
angry!
 He grilled an egg he'd broken into bread. Exchanges of soil-knowledge
 are called landtalking.
 He lives in objectivity. I was sure Bell's palsy would leave my face
 only when he said it had begun to.
Don't say word! when he was eight forbade the word 'autistic' in his
 presence.
 Bantering questions about girlfriends cause a terrified look and blocked
 ears.
 He sometimes centered the farm in a furrowed American Midwest.
Eye contact, Mum! means he truly wants attention. It dislikes I contact.
 He is equitable and kind, and only ever a little jealous. It was a
 relief when that little arrived.
 He surfs, bowls, walks for miles. For many years he hasn't trailed his
 left arm while running.
I gotta get smart! looking terrified into the years. *I gotta get smart!*

UMBERTO SABA

The Goat

I spoke with a goat.
She was alone in the meadow,
bound, bloated with grass, soaked
from the rain, she was bleating.

That steady cry was my own sorrow's brother,
and I answered her,
first in jest, but then because sorrow lasts forever,
with a single voice that never varies.
I heard that voice moaning
in a solitary goat.

In a goat's semitic face
I heard the cry of every trouble,
and of every living thing.

Words

Words
that once mirrored the heart of man, naked
and amazed – in the beginning. A corner
of the world is all I seek, an oasis
where my tears could rinse you of that blinding lie.
And together with those frightful memories
the weight of things would vanish, like snow in the sun.

Translated from the Italian by Avi Sharon

REETIKA VAZIRANI

The True Account of Allama Prabhu

Other vacana saints recognized him instantly as the Master. Basavanna, Mahadevi, Cennabasava, Siddharama, Muktayakka, and others considered him their guru. Basava was known as Anna 'elder brother', Mahadevi as Akka 'elder sister', but Allama was Parabhu or Master to everyone.

— A.K. Ramanujan, Speaking of S'iva

When I addressed the miles of looking men
at the last confluence of these same stars,
why should I have spoken of my love
when I invoked the Lord of the Caves,
true prodigy of wonders.

Awareness came to me but not without a trial.

Earthly things, those I devoured and spit out —.

So I walked on, a *sanyasi*,

not a good *sanyasi* but I walked on toward the Lord of the Caves.

But you who have read Harihara's version ask me of my lover;
that is, my wife.

Curiosity, your unblinking eye, what do you want to know?

We were young, Kamala only just grown.

What did I know of excess — I didn't know.

She was without beginning, middle, or end.

No, not like a flower's tendril, I was a boy,
what were flowers to me?

She was the stream between the fishermen's legs
(the light-giving stream of the yellow sky)
and I drowned myself in desire.

What did I know at fifteen?

At sixteen, the fever came and Kamala was gone like a season.

Three men held me back from the flames,

three years they brought roots which gave sleep.

Forget her, they said, your name is written on the road to the Caves,
long name for a long road — son of *nirahankara*, son of
sujnani, temple-drummer, teacher-man's son.

The years, my friend, they are nothing. Forty-five,
 sixty. Among books, they are the paper wings.
Now they say I am *Prabhu*, the Master.
But disciples, what do they know, they have lost their desire.
Path of Enlightenment? So they believe.

Lacking Kamala, I took the road to the Caves.
Lacking Kamala, I lacked my life
all day watching my shadow's mimicry, though it was I writing odes
 to the caves.
So I am telling you, young friend,
such was the antidote for too much desire.

KAREN VOLKMAN

Winter Abstract

Call me no one, candle abandoned.
From black lots, black columns, dimensions,
scattering wind. It's been a long time here,
the reflected essences of backyards,
photos freezing in your past. And less. And less.
Wouldn't promise but I swore,
love, adventure,
kept the best of our fractured animus,
when you close the door on your nurture –
cure in ice – the most protected picture
once radical, now quest. Dear heathen,
your magnet is nomad, do not ask
for more malignant fires, benigner poles.

DON SHARE

The Story

Sick in the craw,
on a prolonged binge
I wrestle naked-handed with love.
Like the wrack and maw
of weather, this was a seamy
ravishment, taking place *peu à peu*.
You were the woman.
And when you said, "Love is hard
to surrender; it is wrong to give
so much," I knew
it was all up with us.
You know the story:
Shylock and me?
We both had feelings
We both got cut.
The right wind brings tears
even to the biggest bastard's eye.
It's the dictatorship
of the visible effect:
Our washing (my white shirt,
your black slip) hangs
stiff in the yard,
while winter branches freeze,
yet still flex and sing.
Like mending thatch,
or rhyming rats to death,
bending and contrition are lost arts,
and songs no longer move maids.
Marriage has its own desolations.
I have plain intentions.
Yours were bold.
The shifting moon knows some
of this woe:
Hers is a history
of exquisite classifications,
ours a story of divestment
that remains to be told.

W. R. ELTON

home from india

back from India, home at the hotel
this congruence in the scenery of the heart
all avenues vanished, being fully alone

where the weird sun displaces
the personage one dotes on
one savage poem purely placed for another

you caress earth as you caress sunshine
or moonshine and you chant and the concert
sounds and you note the universe in a line

a lifetime gone under, people further than clouds
men unseen in sound and movement and hues
after that strange and fervent virtual India

BRIAN SWANN

The Lost Boy

per me si va tra la perdutta gente

Different, in darkness, the twig was bent back
down into the ground. So it will grow. Paterpornographer
warmed the child in his hand, producing a crop

of continuing silence, prison with small sky. The robber
of the name still shares the name that opens
its night in night, secret tainted flower,

while in the interlocking circles, action
has retreated to the depth of decades where
love's first star's still propped up in
its empty blue. So whenever something near
shines the boy-man closes his face, quickly turns away
from more than rumors on the wind, from far

back, speaking evacuated houses, dues paid
in blood. Now through the rusty drizzle of chrysanthemums
he hears a drumming from where water pools, delayed,

slips through rocks, over the abandoned road, runs
through the dead yew's roots into the orchard where
over-ripe apples still hang, and the nightly procession's left some

scraps and shreds like shadows caught there
on bushes, stirring when a lost child passes,
a breath inside the ghost, hanging here,

the fruit of nightmare, picked again by hands that catch
at, grope, suborn, *a fantasy come home*,
forever he's leaving his own life, fast

and faster, manchild impaled on the shrike's thorn
of his own mind, hearing voices of women
fainter, half-light wrapped loose around them.

While on horseback, painted phallus with eyes strapped on,
the father still gathers him for distances
cranes know, making long streaks of themselves in

air. *It's not wrong*. Kept a child. That voice professes
everything unchanged, praises the "natural";
via parody, everything's a dance, of weariness;

that authority in the very waves' back-curl's
always about to swamp his little boat
with innuendoed intimacies. The call

of a wild dog limps away. Silence bloats.

STEVEN MARCUS

Rekindling the Hard Gemlike Flame

During the last several decades there has been something of a reawakening of interest in Walter Pater – who was at one time widely regarded as a figure of formidable influence and significant achievement, but whose claims on the attention of modern readers began rapidly to diminish within a decade after his death. For some time, indeed, representations made on his behalf that exceeded the most constrained moderation were almost certain to be met with dismissive gestures or with even less agreeable silence. Pater died in 1894 while his reputation was still general and prepotent. Denis Donoghue has written what he calls “a critical biography” of Pater, in part, one supposes, brought forth by the centenary occasion, in part, of course, because of his interest in the phenomenon of Pater himself. That interest, lit up in the perspective created by Donoghue’s own very substantial critical accomplishments, sets in motion certain obligations in readers to respond.

Moreover, Donoghue’s appraisal has arrived as a kind of culmination to a considerable series of academic biographical and critical studies of Pater during the last twenty years that have all tended in the same general direction. It puts forward from the outset the strong contention that Pater is one of the key figures in modernism, as well as the first modernist in English, the pressure of whose presence persists into what is virtually the immediate present. Pater, Donoghue proposes, “is audible in virtually every attentive modern writer – in Hopkins, Wilde, James, Yeats, Pound, Ford, Woolf, Joyce, Eliot, Hart Crane, Fitzgerald, Forster, Borges, Stevens, Ammons, Tomlinson, and Ashbery.” That’s an impressive array, although there are notable absences from it once you come to think about the matter. Nevertheless, he goes on, the nature of Pater’s “presence is elusive. It is harder to say that he is there, than that he has been there.” Pater is, in other words, less of an unhindered influence on other writers than he is a spectral presence for them, and even that slippery entailment or dim assertion of appearance is apprehensible largely as a residue, a shade, or a trace. His prolonged existence is hence principally to be noted as either intertextual echoes or anticipations. He is almost as much the little man who wasn’t there as he is the whispering sibilant wraith that was. The strong contention, then, which is one of the chief themes that Donoghue pursues throughout, tends to be counterbalanced by the oddly recalcitrant timidity and daintiness of most of the manifestations of Pater’s prose that Donoghue’s predication has to rely upon for evidence

Editor’s Note:

WALTER PATER: LOVER OF STRANGE SOULS. By Denis Donoghue.
Alfred A. Knopf. \$28.00.

and persuasion. He has in other words set himself a task that in its difficulty is suitable to his ingenuity and resourcefulness as a critic of modern literature. Part of the interest in reading Donoghue's book lies in point of fact in following how and estimating whether he is able successfully to sustain that contention through concentrating upon the paradoxical challenge that he has formulated as a test for it.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Donoghue abjures biographical readings of Pater's texts, even when they are unmistakably autobiographical, as in the exceptionally interesting account called "The Child in the House." First printed in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1878, it was not published in book form until *Miscellaneous Studies* appeared in 1895, after Pater's death. Pater called it an "imaginary portrait," but when he came to issue a volume called *Imaginary Portraits*, in 1887, he rather pointedly left this portrait, which is by far the best of them, out. None of this detail impresses Donoghue, who sets himself severely against any such interpretive tendency "is no good." Donoghue regards himself as being a scrupulous adherent and transmitter of the old New Criticism in its highest form, and he seems content to reaffirm – with perhaps some slight officiousness – T. S. Eliot's assertion that the more complete the artist, the more separate in him will be the man who suffered and the mind that created. But is Pater that complete an artist? Apparently not. Donoghue admits as much, and more. "There is a relation between life and work. Blake's works did not issue from Wordsworth's life. But the relation is occult; it can't be specified." Not quite; and not in absolute measure. The relation is not *entirely* occult, though some opacity will always remain. And the relation can't be *fully* specified, though some, or even numerous, specifications can be usefully put forward with propriety. In a similar sense, he remarks that the mysterious character of the mind of an artist "can't finally be explained or explained away" by a recitation of the conditions "personal, domestic, social, economic, and political" that went into "its production." "Finally" is satisfactory, but it doesn't go quite far enough. Moreover, no one seriously believes in explaining anything "away." And explanation needs further modification in the direction of either fully or adequately. My guess or intuition is that there is an excess of protestation here, and perhaps some displacement.

This supposition is supported by what comes next. For after having delivered himself of these reservations, Donoghue goes on, surprisingly, to write a "Brief Biography" of Pater that takes up about ninety pages of the book. It is an admirable and acute series of sketches, though it is hardly brief and only notionally biographical. Within the commonly accredited sense of the term, Pater's biography contains very little to talk about; almost nothing appears to have happened to him, and when something did he had as a rule almost nothing to say about it. Which does not mean that

he did not live, but that most of his life was spent in mental activity – reading widely in several languages, looking at works of art, teaching or tutoring, traveling on the Continent, socializing in a mild, reserved, recessive way with other writers and men of letters, and thinking and writing. Born in London, he attended school in Canterbury, where he did very well and passed on uneventfully to Oxford, where he was to remain for most of the rest of his life – as a student at Queen’s College and then later as a fellow or don at Brasenose, teaching classics for the most part.

Pater’s father died when he was a little more than two years old; his mother lived only until he was fifteen. As a young boy, he was religious in sentiment, observance and belief and aspired to enter the ministry. At Oxford, he read modern writers and philosophers, including Darwin, and expectably gave up his religious faith – though not, for some time, his ambition of taking orders in the Church of England. The loss of faith, Donoghue tells us, “didn’t constitute a crisis”; it seems barely to have qualified as an event or (in view of Pater’s unaltered plans for a career) to have occurred or been registered as an experience. Pater appears to have had, Donoghue shrewdly surmises, “no sense of guilt or sin. Or if he had, he soon consigned it to a more comprehensive sense of the lack, the empty necessity of life, for which he was not responsible.” In addition, he was afflicted by another infirmity, his deplorable appearance: he was in fact ugly and said that he would give ten years of his life to be handsome. Such circumstances taken together – the early loss of both his parents, the falling away of his religious beliefs, his discreditable physical looks – tended to make, in my view, for internal conditions of distress that anticipated what we would call today narcissistic perturbances. The general or prevailing manifestations of deficits in psychic structures are to be found not only in the idiosyncracies and absences in Pater’s life. They are there to be made out with equal directness and persuasiveness in his writing – in the fragile and sometimes almost formless architecture of his prose, with its characteristic and obsessive local qualities of postponement, delay, indecisiveness, and reluctance to come to closure (all of which Donoghue analyses to exceptionally intelligent effect). But they are there as well in the extreme weakness of Pater’s narrative skills and constructions. His stories are virtually without narrative spine or forward movement, and *Marius the Epicurean* is about as extravagantly deficient in the configurations of plot and story as any novel that has ever been written; heaven only knows what contemporary readers really could make of it – it sold well – or how many of them were able to find their way through its ambling and often purposeless divagations. Indeed Pater’s return in later life to occasional attendance at church – without the least alteration in his lack of belief – has the same inner absence of resonance as the slow, aimless wanderings of both the narrative

and expository trajectories of most of his essays and fictional pieces.

The one unambiguously important consideration of Pater's life has to do with his homosexual disposition. He seems never to have been in doubt about it himself, and neither so far as one can tell were any of his contemporaries. He was as explicit about it as the written codes of the period permitted, and more so in his earlier writing than later on. In this sense he is one of the principal figures in the emergence of what was to become consolidated as an increasingly explicit or semi-visible sub-culture of homosexual life, art, literary interests, writing, and social associations, friendships, and even cult-like behaviors among middle- and upper-class males in Britain toward the end of the nineteenth century and after. He is such a figure because it is in his writings, muffled though they often are, that certain characteristic expressions of homosexual sensibility, interests, tastes, and idiomatic turns of phrase first found their transitional way into the wider common stream of modern British literary discourse. Found their way, and were also legitimated, accepted as part of the general discourse about art and culture, under the rubrics of aestheticism, or art for art's sake, or even decadence, a "comely decadence" to be sure. When George Eliot wrote of Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* that the book "seems to me quite poisonous in its false principles of criticism and false conceptions of life," one can be quite assured that her acrimonious disapprobation was not being directed principally at Pater's impressionism or aestheticism or even his hedonism. It was being directed at what must have appeared to her, and to others as well, as the insidious and inseparable entwining, among all those other dubious tendencies of sensibility, of an incitement to dissolute, promiscuous and criminal sexuality on top of everything else.

That incitement was to remain, in the instance of Pater himself, largely a matter of words. Despite some vagrant if persistent tatters of gossip no substantial evidence has yet turned up to demonstrate that he ever acted conclusively upon his homosexuality – although he seems to have made no efforts to deny it or his interest in it ("it" being as late as the 1880s not yet clearly or consensually defined either medically, legally, or even socially), while remaining consistently decorous in his speech and behavior. These inhibitions, combined with such narcissistic or quasi-narcissistic vacancies and deficits as I have touched upon already, must have made for an internal life suffused with misgivings, mortifications, and instabilities, and toward agitations of self-esteem. Indeed, when Donoghue remarks of Pater's life that, "At Oxford he was that comfortable being, a bachelor don of homosexual disposition," I think he is rather overstating the case, almost certainly as far as the younger Pater is concerned. I am prompted to this amendment by one passage at least. It occurs in the first published version of what was to eventuate as the famous Conclusion to

the *Renaissance*. The Conclusion itself made its initial appearance as part of an anonymous review-essay, "Poems by William Morris," in the October, 1868 issue of the *Westminster Review*. Pater excised the passage in question when he republished what is substantially the last part of the review-essay in 1873 as the Conclusion, and in fact never reprinted it. The passage follows upon his description of how human subjectivity reduces experience to a stream of impressions, fleeting, always moving, a "passage and dissolution" without surcease, a "continual vanishing away, that strange perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves." Such thoughts, begins the segment that was to be suppressed, "seem desolate at first," as if they might as second thoughts become something other:

at times all the bitterness of life seems concentrated in them. They bring the image of one washed out beyond the bar in a sea at ebb, losing even his personality as the elements of which he is composed pass into new combinations. Struggling, as he must, to save his self, it is himself that he loses at every moment.

Pater gave no reason for his permanent effacement of this passage, but it seems to me to be an utterance of and about an unstable and deeply uncomfortable self. It describes a self whose maintenance requires extravagances of effort, whose loss of sustaining supplies seems recurrent, and whose structure, minimal as it anyway is, verges continually upon dissolution. This too is not only a precursor of the modern; it is a palpable anticipation of the contemporary as well.

The one indubitable, real incident in Pater's life was the scandal that occurred in the period that immediately followed the publication of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*. Not only the Introduction and the Conclusion, but in particular the essays on Leonardo and Wincklemann – along with stray comments throughout – were as if calculated to cause offense and act as an affront. As were Pater's skepticism, irreligion, and hedonism, his emphasis on beauty, intensity, and maximal "pulsations," and such of his formulations as "art for art's sake" and "not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end" and "failure is to form habits." These and other related particulars, along with his impressionism and stress upon evanescence and mobility, in company with the thinly veiled solicitations to transgressive sexual behavior, were bound to bring down censure, rebuke, and charges of indecency upon his head. Pater seems to have been mildly surprised, if not disconcerted, by the clamor his book had raised (there were also some spurious rumors of flagrant behavior on his part; but these came to nothing). Moreover, he was not indifferent to the charges made in pri-

vate letters to him and in printed reviews protesting against his overt hostility to Christianity and deploring the subversive influence that his writing would have on “the morals of impressionable young men.” This Pater of the first edition of the *Renaissance* is the “antinomian” writer that Donoghue singles out, constructs and prefers. In the sense that antinomian means “against the law,” it was not a Pater that would stand up unmodified for very long. He turned turtle. He did not scruple to suppress the Conclusion when the second edition of the *Renaissance* was published; and he gave both time and energy throughout the balance of his life, as further editions were published, to toning down, defanging, expunging and blunting many of the phrases and clauses that seemed likely to provoke disapproval. He nonetheless remains antinomian, Donoghue claims, in the sense that he has modified the force of the term toward being “independent of the law rather than against it.” In this context, Pater cultivated the art, where moral issues and choices were at stake, of “standing aside.” This behavior itself entails a moral choice, and does not constitute a position of strength, as will be presently seen.

Early on at Oxford, Pater had recognized that Ruskin and Arnold had to be his two masters in criticism, and the *Renaissance* is replete with evidence that he had done his homework with care. However lesser a figure he is than either of them (or than Newman), he is the next in line in the English critical tradition. As if to give both substance and warrant to this (nowadays) not exactly congenial conclusion, Donoghue devotes the rest of the section on Pater’s biography to his relations and friendships, if you can call them that, with other writers – and there were many of them – almost all of them homoerotic. Gerard Manly Hopkins was Pater’s student for a short time, before departing for the headier if safer world of Newman and Catholicism. Pater sustained long associations with Henry James, with the slightly scandalous Oscar Browning, and with John Addington Symonds. These acquaintanceships, as Donoghue skillfully deals with them, are composed for us largely of what such writers had to say about Pater – the man himself remains more than less mute for most of the section. He also became interested in Simeon Solomon, an openly homosexual artist; and when Solomon was arrested for importuning in a public urinal, Pater did not abandon him (unlike Swinburne, who did), but kept up his connection with this gifted but hapless reprobate.

Wilde was also a student and friend, and made all too much of it throughout the years, but Pater managed, as he always did, to keep his distance – in the instance of Wilde it was a matter of both good luck and of habitual recessiveness on Pater’s part that there was so little of him to grasp. One can only imagine what an appalling mess it would have been had he permitted himself to get entangled in Wilde’s life. In any event, he

made his qualified approval clear in a review of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in which praise was mixed with reservations. In particular, he felt he had to single out for critical reproof Wilde's version of Epicureanism, which, Pater remarked, failed to achieve, "a complete though harmonious development of man's entire organism." Shades of Matthew Arnold; Walter Pater as Culture's ventriloquist's dummy! Wilde got his own back at this subdued bitchiness on a later occasion. According to Max Beerbohm, when Wilde heard of Pater's death, he asked, "Was he ever alive?" Pater's further acquaintanceships with the likes of George Moore, Arthur Symonds, and Lionel Johnson among others do not move us any closer to an answer to Wilde's question, which in any case is probably the wrong one to put. Nevertheless, there remains something so remote about Pater that one has to ask repeatedly what might have been going on inside him. I have tried to suggest a possible avenue for further exploration. Donoghue is more prudent, and gives us instead a finely tuned account of how Pater appeared as he passed across or through the attention of others.

In the central section of his three-part study, Donoghue moves on to Pater's work – though he has already dedicated a number of densely composed pages to some of the more important passages in the *Renaissance* in the section on Pater's life. Donoghue's method seems altogether straightforward: he undertakes to examine Pater's writings in chronological order. He begins with the early essay, "Diaphaneite" and goes on to a subtle, closely argued, and elegant analysis of additional leading moments in the *Renaissance*, including a measured rebuke of Pater for, almost surely, willfully misrepresenting certain places in Arnold. But then, oddly enough, he abruptly seems to run out of steam. Although he dutifully soldiers along with short chapters on Leonardo, Botticelli, and Winckelmann, and then with further brief forays into Pater's other books and essays, there is no consecutive or evolving argument to be followed. This may be a result of the inadequacy of coherent development in Pater's thinking itself, or it may be that Donoghue finds it too wearing to sustain a point-by-point, consecutive discussion of a critic whose prose can run for pages to "fined down" vacuity. A book of three hundred and thirty pages divided into thirty (at times excursive) chapters suggests some kind of discontinuity. On occasion, Donoghue discusses something by Pater as if he were under an obligation to discharge a set of notes he had taken on a previous reading. Sometimes he writes as if a certain amount of talking to oneself ("Antinomianism is crucial. I must stay with it.") were part of the ordeal of being a contemporary literary critic. And sometimes he makes it appear as if it were incumbent upon him to express his lack of certitude about what segments of an always doubtful or hypothetical audience might at any moment be still paying attention. Always intelligent, always serious, always concerned

with large cultural circumstances, he nevertheless seems intermittently throughout the text to be nibbling away at themes rather than chewing them over – no doubt Pater's hide-and-seek manner of conducting his intellectual life is in large measure accountable for such an impression. And on occasion he seems driven to *longuers* of quiet exasperation: "Pater put all his trust in consciousness because he couldn't think of anything better to do with his time." It isn't clear to me whether in an utterance such as this the redoubtable Donoghue was simply non-plussed and laid himself down, so to speak, in the middle of the road, or whether the delayed influence of his long immersion in Pater's prose caused his mind to suspend operations for half a moment. Whatever the cause may be, this reader is prepared to testify that Pater can induce this effect in anyone.

Despite the fragmentary, or digressive, nature of much of this study, Donoghue makes Pater seem more interesting, and more of a "problem," than he has ever been before. The scattered nuggets of observation, speculation, discontinued arguments and started-up but then suspended themes and topics that Donoghue leaves behind will be eventually picked up by lesser commentators and made into monographs. Still, the book suffers from its slightly broken structure, and as Donoghue's interest in Pater appears to falter and decline as he marches ahead, through, across or past one work after another, his own prose here and there makes for heavy weather. It was probably incautious of him to commit himself to a plan that required comprehensiveness of coverage. This estimate is, I believe, supported by the final, sixty-page section of the book, which has no title, but which is in substance an extended essay on Donoghue's "essential Pater." This is the Pater with whom he began the book, the first of the modernists in English, the subdued yet unrepentant antinomian, the apostle of the autonomy of art, someone who remains of use to us today, and for whom Donoghue can argue with his accustomed vivacity. In particular, the Pater who originally put forward the claim of art for art's sake comes in for his warmer approval –

If you are listening to a Beethoven quartet, you do well not to be thinking of anything else, even of sin, expiation, redemption, and God. I wish the doctrine could be given a second chance, now that we are admonished to regard a work of art as merely a disguised ideological formation and to attend to it as a detective interrogates a subject.

The first sentence of this passage is arguable, and its recommendation is, in my view, virtually impossible to follow and perhaps even inappropriate to try. (In any event, it depends on which Beethoven quartet one is talking about; if it is one of the late works, I don't see how one can avoid

at some points thinking about such ultimate matters as Donoghue refers to.) The second sentence, however, in which he deplores the kind of politically correct usages prevalent in recent critical practices is directly on the mark. He recurs to this matter once more at the very end where he again strenuously takes issue with the

disastrous . . . subjection of literature and art to the censorship of blantly reductive attention in behalf of political, social and moral rectitude. Eliot was right: if you read literature, it is as literature that you must read it and not as another thing . . . politics, religion, democracy, any ideology one cares to name.

If we read literature only to find in it evidence of bad faith, right-wing politics, the atrocities of Empire, racial and sexual prejudice, or any other attitude we disapprove of, we should give it up and confine our attention to TV and letters to the editor. If we no longer respect the difference between a work of art and an editorial, the game is up. Literature and art add objects to the world and, in so doing, call for aesthetic attention.

Donoghue is once more altogether right, I believe, in his articulation of critical animus against such current, continuing tendencies in academic literary pursuits toward reductive politicization. How strong an ally – or fellow combatant – Pater, the Pater who chose “standing aside” as his strategy of moral choice, makes in these critical skirmishes and ideological hand-to-hands remains problematical. Donoghue himself is aware of such difficulties. He comes back one more time to the relation of literature to music: “We should read literature in the spirit in which we enter a concert hall. This is difficult because literature is verbal and shares with other forms of discourse a semantic capacity.”

Again, the first sentence is both suggestive and dubious. The second sentence is of course correct, and it is where Pater is once more likely to fail us. After all, the general tendency of his writing is to move away from the thematic and the referential, and toward verbal expressions of mood, of distinctions so exquisitely fine that they can “fine down” to prolix insubstantiality. Nevertheless, Donoghue has made the best case I know for Pater’s continuing interest and salience today, and that is no trivial achievement. Pater does remain of interest; he is the first of the modernists (along with Wilde) in English. And he continues to refresh us in his refusal of the ideological. Whatever his shortcomings, these qualities are not hollow or gratuitous appeals to our minds as they seek to find again the tract of intellectual ground out of which the main stream of criticism will one day rise up to flow once more.

BOOKS

Assault on History

THE KILLING OF HISTORY. HOW A DISCIPLINE IS BEING MURDERED BY LITERARY CRITICS AND SOCIAL THEORISTS.
By **Keith Windshuttle**. Maclea. \$24.95.

The title of Professor Windshuttle's book is misleading: he is not only writing about the killing of history, but about what amounts to an assault on all of rational thought in the best of our universities. Unlike most American professors, this Australian historian has the courage to debunk the literary theories that have nothing to do with literature, the new historicism that abuses history, and the sociological studies that end up finding what they set out to prove. He goes about this task by revealing the fault lines inherent in the currently fashionable theories that are offshoots and elaborations of French structuralism, deconstruction and poststructuralism. Unlike most other critics of this enterprise, he takes on all these trendy innovations at once, and shows how contentious notions and speculations by an academic fringe came to be extolled as superior learning.

Each of the chapters in this book delves into one or more of the major unexamined assumptions inherent in these theoretical innovations. For instance, he recalls that Lévi-Strauss's structuralism set out to uncover the unconscious structures of mind among the Bororo in the interior of Brazil — by means of analyzing their oral myths along with those of neighboring tribes. But whereas Lévi-Strauss was searching for a universal attribute shared by all of humanity, his followers construct their own myths; and whereas he went on to generalize to the relationship of nature to culture, they explore the differences among cultures. Therefore, many of the practitioners of the trendy discourses forget that for Lévi-Strauss Saussure's system of language, its division into *langue* and *parole* (of meaning and acoustic image), was postulated as being as applicable to social phenomena as to spoken language; that he considered this method of analysis as "scientific"; and that he more or less repudiated the entire undertaking in 1968.

Derrida's poststructuralism, we are reminded, and which a few years ago began to intrigue many professors of English, shares some of Saussure's assumptions. But it mostly leans on Heidegger's dubious, existentialist philosophy, and on Barthes's playful notions of literature. And by treating "real life" as a text, it relinquishes all judgment. "There is nothing outside the text," is one of Derrida's oft-quoted, sage pronouncements. Along with his acolytes in philosophy and literary criticism Derrida began to

“deconstruct” texts, in order to show that no text ever says what its writer intended – and instead has many, often contradictory, meanings. They go on to argue that one reading is as valid as any other which, in turn, leads them to conclude that there is no rational argument in philosophy, and that every meaning is relative to every other meaning. They presume that there is no such thing as objective knowledge, and that chronological history is no more than a fiction. Thus, one interpretation of an event is as good as any other.

Michel Foucault, who started out as a philosopher, may well be the most frequently invoked of the gurus. His early structuralism dealt with the history of ideas, mostly from the perspective of marginalized groups – the sick, the insane, the criminal. I was somewhat taken with these pre-1968 works: they were based on empirical evidence (some of which could be disputed on empirical grounds) and, even though slanted, threw a novel light on social issues. However, when I published my book, *The Age of Structuralism: From Lévi-Strauss to Foucault*, and colleagues asked me how they could apply his findings to their own research in the sociology of medicine or criminal behavior, I explained why this could not be done. This was in the late 1970s, when Foucault already had turned to Nietzsche’s subjectivism; and when he was starting to elaborate on the intrinsic connections between knowledge and power, totally rejected his earlier methodological works, and became more involved in political action.

Professor Windshuttle correctly places the beginning of the current movements in America in the 1970s. By then, all the original French structuralists – Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, Barthes, Althusser and Foucault – had distanced themselves from these endeavors. That was when their earlier works were beginning to be translated. Now, long after their heyday in Paris, the structuralists were being feted as celebrities in the foremost American academic circles. As Professor Windshuttle so clearly demonstrates, before long they also captured the Australian intellectual high ground in the New Humanities:

Literary studies has linked up with aspects of linguistics, usually called semiotics, and together they have explored the social relations of culture, bringing in aspects of philosophy, psychology and history. . . Gallic names like Foucault, Macherey, Derrida, flow like great wine brands around the lips of serious staff and students these days.

He cites the American critics of this enterprise, such as Roger Kimball, Dinesh D’Souza and Allan Bloom, as well as a few British and

French attempts at resistance. It takes courage to join the opponents, he notes, since these “new theorists” keep books by dissenters from being reviewed, pan them reactionary and conservative, or put them down as just plain wrong. Consequently, antagonists inhabit minuscule oases in a vast desert of gibberish, and the colonization of academe proceeds apace. A lecturer “in an English medical school,” Professor Windshuttle states, “assures us that our concepts of ‘the patient’ and ‘illness’ are ‘sociological fictions’ which can be expunged by ‘elements of feminist theory and Derridean concepts of *différance* and intertextuality.” I should add that not even Derrida ever produced such a mishmash.

In fact, the infatuation with this nonsense began in Anglo-Saxon (primarily American elite) universities, when the recognition that these institutions were too rigidly segregated into departments was being fused with the aims of partisan politics. To steer the curriculum away from traditional learning, the cultural politics that followed from the events of the late 1960s soon were being converted into cultural studies which, in turn, were bending the French theories out of shape in order to further liberationist ends. According to Professor Windshuttle, cultural studies for some “amounts to little more than opportunism.” For others it has become a refuge from Marxism. To the new historicists, it has provided a methodology to debunk history as we have known it. One of its proponents defines cultural studies not as “a *critique* of poststructuralism but rather an *extension* of this movement into ideology, history writing and social theory of the past.” These historicists reject those aspects of the scientific method of the Enlightenment that were based on observation and inductive argument; they do not approve of history that moves over time; they do not distinguish between history and fiction; and they do not believe that what we used to call truth may even be approximated.

In the chapter, “The Fall of Communism and the End of History,” Professor Windshuttle focuses on the critiques of Francis Fukuyama’s thesis. He agrees with Fukuyama that Marxism as a coherent and universal process fueled by the class struggle is dead, and that history moves forward insofar as technology and scientific progress engender more and more homogenization of human societies – in terms of urbanization, education of citizens, modernization and consumerism. But he disputes that this evolution necessarily is linked to capitalism. And he elegantly and knowledgeably summarizes the dangers posed by increasing economic inequality, nationalism, religious fundamentalism, creeping socialism and state corporatism, as well as by the levelling effects of liberalism. Both the right and the left, he maintains, keep holding on to some sort of Hegelian explanation of history they must discard. An empirical approach alone is valid, he states:

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The job of the historian is not to search for some theory that will reveal all, nor some teleology that will explain the purpose of things. Rather, it is to reconstruct the events of the past in their own terms. The reason that narrative is the most appropriate method through which to do this is because the historian is dealing in unique events, in the realm of the contingent.

Such an approach, he says, would save historians from the undue influence of Nietzsche and Heidegger, whose philosophies to some extent were underpinning, also, the Nazi regime and yet were accepted by Foucault, Lacan and Derrida. Professor Windshuttle quotes, for instance, the German historian, Lutz Niethammer, who wrote about *posthistoire*, which argues that the end of history from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century is “a culturally pessimistic inversion of the optimism of progress,” a sort of anti-utopia. Its fascist version, Niethammer found, was a precursor of French radical thought. A recent idol of American post-modern critics, especially in media studies, Jean Baudrillard, replaces Niethammer’s pessimism with the “attention-seeking metaphors of post-modernism.” As Professor Windshuttle concludes

... those English-speaking academics who are investing their time, energy and personal endorsement in the concept of postmodernism . . . thought they were participating in an exciting and new theoretical movement. Instead, all they are producing, albeit unwittingly, is an English-language version of a French theory from the 1980s, which itself derives from a German thesis from the 1940s and 1950s that was originally developed by a group of ex-Nazis to lament the defeat of the Third Reich.

Professor Windshuttle illustrates “The Deconstruction of Imperial History” by means of Paul Carter’s rewriting of Australian history as “spatial history.” This approach allegedly overcomes the flaws of traditional, empirical, narrative approaches. Carter’s blanket rejection of the countless memoirs and histories – of the founding fathers and the explorers – is achieved by explaining the names of places on the new continent in terms of language categories. Professor Windshuttle calls this an arrogant backpacker’s theory of history that ignores the enormous sources of convicts’ literature, as well as the oral histories of the Aborigines. For instance, Carter expects to “recover our grasp on their world,” and to invoke their original experiences without “appropriating it to white

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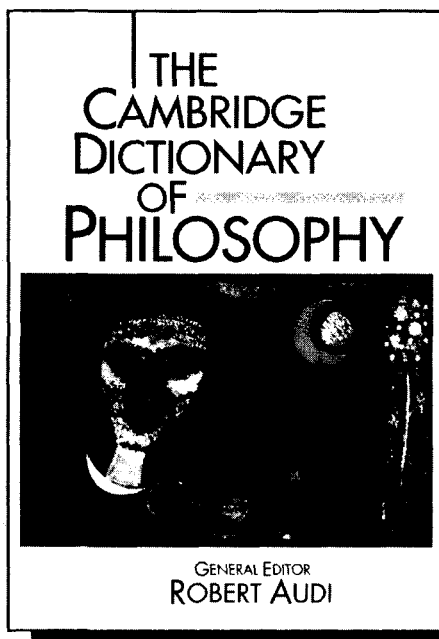
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ends.” But he ignores that Aboriginal people knew of their treatment, of the massacres of their forebears, etc., that convicts all along had been writing down their experiences – and that all of that has been examined over and over again from many angles and political perspectives.

In the last chapter, “The Return of Tribalism,” Professor Windshuttle scrutinizes the American ethnographer Marshall Sahlins’s view of Captain Cook’s reception by the natives of Hawaii in 1779. Sahlins cast Cook as the Hawaiians’ returned god Lono. The Sri Lankan historian, Gananath Obeyesekere, argued that the Hawaiians had too much practical rationality to mistake an Englishman, in strange clothes, who neither spoke their language nor knew of their religion, for one of their gods. Sahlins, who is a big cheese among the postmoderns, brought out all the customary ammunition, from Lévi-Strauss and Foucault to lesser figures, and to Chinese taxonomy. But Obeyesekere insisted, rather forcefully, that structuralist theory was useless in the writing of history. He argued that Sahlins seemed to be just another American with a low opinion of the native mind, and that Cook’s visit, which had had a profoundly disruptive effect on Hawaiian culture, entailed such rapid change that “a structuralist theory does not provide a good account of native mentalities in the post-contact period.” Clearly, Obeyesekere not only endangered Sahlins’s reputation and life work, but that of the entire postmodern enterprise — far beyond anthropology and history. So, in addition to the most minute details of Cook’s deeds and thoughts, the politics of colonialism and post-colonialism were being dragged in, and were defended by the strongest guns among cultural relativists.

Professor Windshuttle notes that the late Ernest Gellner showed conclusively that:

... relativists are saddled with two unresolvable dilemmas. They endorse as legitimate other cultures that do not return the compliment. Some other cultures, of which the best known is Islam, will have no truck with relativism of any kind. . . . They regard [it]. . . as profoundly mistaken and, moreover, debasing. Relativism devalues their faith because it reduces it to merely one of many equally valid systems of meaning. So, entailed within cultural relativism is, first, an endorsement of absolutisms that deny it, and, second, a demeaning attitude to cultures it claims to respect.

Unfortunately, most graduate students – our future professors – no longer are being taught by the Gellners and Windshuttles among us, and thus are being inducted into their disciplines by postmodern relativists,

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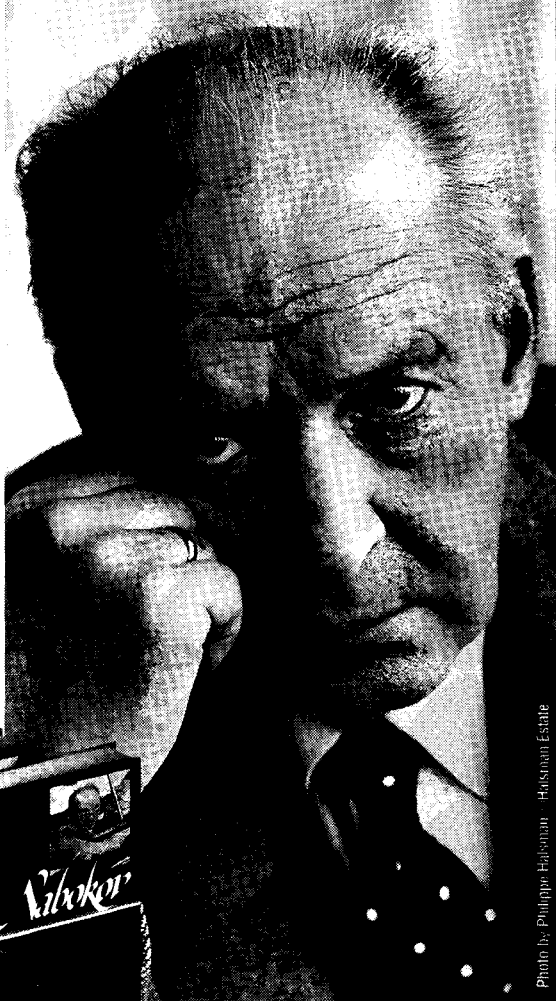
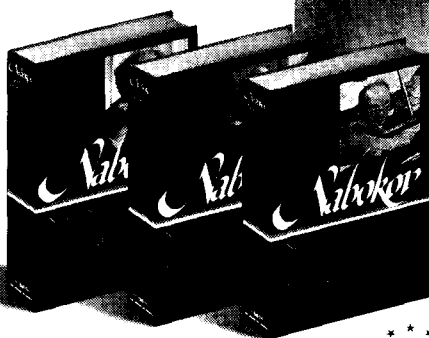


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who have become the doyens in many academic departments. "That is a tragedy that has befallen your universities," a journalist from down under told me not long ago. "Only your mainstream journalists could help rectify this situation," he went on, "but I keep observing that they're part of this culture. . . ." What is to be done?

EDITH KURZWEIL

A Child of Bloomsbury

BLOOMSBURY RECALLED. By **Quentin Bell**. Columbia University Press. \$24.95

Disputes about who began the Bloomsbury Group may not be easily settled, but there is one, indisputable relation to it, that of Quentin Bell, the author of this book who was *born* into Bloomsbury, as was his sister, Angelica. This special "birthright" privilege enhances their recollections with an intimacy and filiation not equalled by the comments of observers. The famous early twentieth-century avant-garde circle, named for a London district, usually includes Virginia and Leonard Woolf, John Maynard Keynes, the economist, Duncan Grant, the painter, Clive Bell and Roger Fry, theorists of the new art, T. S. Eliot, the American poet, Lady Ottoline Morrell, the flamboyant society bohemian, and, centrally positioned, the painter, mother, lover, Vanessa Bell. As with other circles, like The Souls or The Coterie, or even more recently, the "New York intellectuals," size and membership were fluid and disputed.

Bloomsbury was the form Bohemianism took in London before and after World War I, but the "new life" established in those streets and squares near the British Museum, and in the Sussex outpost, Charleston, was swallowed up in World War II. Cultural changes Bloomsbury inaugurated can be traced in ideas about personal freedom in social relations, individual literary and intellectual originality, and even in the decision of Leonard and Virginia Woolf to found their own publishing house, the Hogarth Press. Social tolerance, new social movements, new music, new design, and new thought of every kind were associated with Bloomsbury. Bertrand Russell was close to them, G. E. Moore had been a mentor for some of the young men at Cambridge, others knew Wittgenstein and D. H. Lawrence. The Woolfs' Hogarth Press published T. S. Eliot's early poems and *The Waste Land*.

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Charleston, Bloomsbury's country location, survived until the death of Duncan Grant in 1978. After that, it became an endangered fragment of modernism, historic, needing to be maintained and preserved. The old Sussex farmhouse where Vanessa Bell lived with her children and Duncan Grant, and other friends, did not *belong* to any of them. They may have decorated the walls and fireplaces, the windows and doors, in an inimitable "Charleston" style, but the local aristocrat actually owned it and could dispose of it if and when he chose. Fortunately, the Charleston Trust was created, the house was saved, the wallpaintings preserved. Now it is a subject of scholarship, a place to visit, where lectures and summer schools are conducted, and Charleston-related gifts sold. The gardens were replanted under the direction of Sir Peter Shepherd, the eminent landscape architect. Charleston has loaned its name to a collection of fabrics produced by the Laura Ashley firm.

Quentin Bell and his sister were the children of Clive and Vanessa Bell. Their older brother, Julian, died in 1937 in Spain. There are also *grandchildren* of Bloomsbury – Quentin's three and Angelica's four. Quentin Bell is an artist, a sculptor, writer, potter, art critic and teacher. He has been Professor of Fine Arts at the University of Leeds, Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford, and Professor of Art History and Theory at the University of Sussex. He has written on Bloomsbury before, and on Charleston, as well as on the pre-Raphaelites, and Ruskin; many readers will know of his important two-volume biography of Virginia Woolf, his aunt. There were few other children of Bloomsbury, as Keynes, Forster, the Woolfs, Eliot, Strachey and Carrington did not reproduce themselves.

Matthew Arnold summed up his impressions of the Shelley-Byron circle, and their activities, with the now-classic comment, "What a set!" He did not mean it approvingly. But in our own lifetime, the activities of the Bloomsbury Group, and of those remotely connected with it, are often categorized with the same expression offered with a different meaning. The liberated sexual behavior of Vanessa Bell, Maynard Keynes, Clive Bell, Duncan Grant, Lytton Strachey, and others is admiringly recounted. Freedom from Victorian convention, unorthodox *ménages*, advanced art and ideas – these are the celebrated Bloomsbury characteristics. Arnold's expression is borrowed awkwardly, raising questions.

This latest book on Bloomsbury was published in England under the title *Elders and Betters*. (This is an ironic usage, by a child of the bohemian world, of a traditional English designation familiar from the Anglican catechism and the speech of the lower classes.) The book's illustrations include photographs and portraits by Bloomsbury artists of Bloomsbury people. The book-jacket shows Quentin painted as a child by his mother in 1919, and by his son in 1988. What is especially interesting about these

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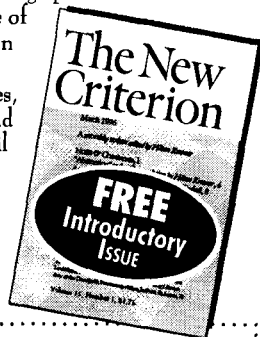
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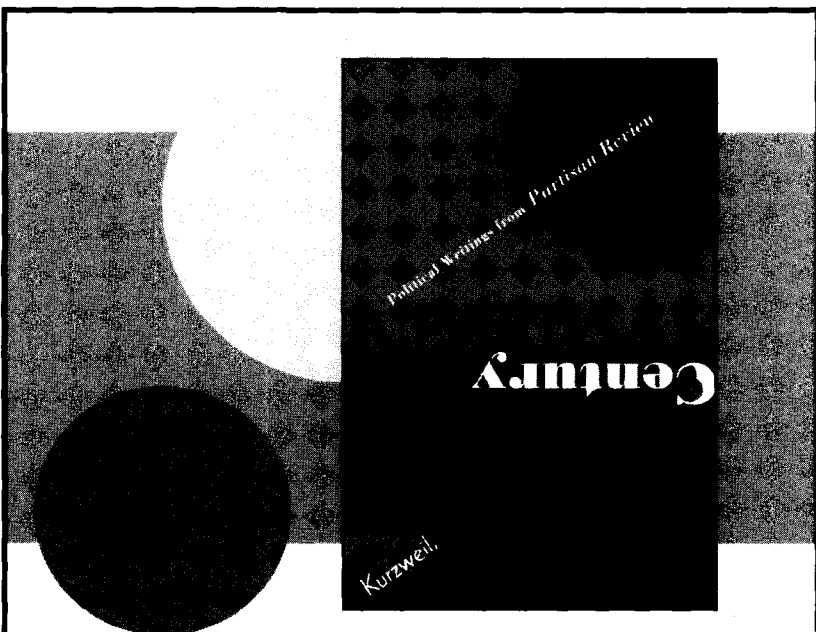
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new reflections is that they provide not the familiar admiring and celebratory reports about life in Bloomsbury which others have offered, not an appraisal of Bloomsbury's value, influence, contribution or significance, which has occupied scholars, but, as it were, a child's-eye view – what it was like to be the child of those parents, the observer of their friends, those “giants in the earth.”

E. M. Forster was one whom the young Quentin observed, and Roger Fry, “the best of teachers” and Vanessa's lover. Leonard Woolf, married to Quentin's aunt when Quentin was two years old, was strict, kindly, avuncular, less easy-going than the Charleston family, more intellectual and less aesthetic. A child could perceive this in the difference between the wild gardens at Charleston and the more rigorously tended gardens at the Woolfs' house nearby. And a child could sense the cordial enmity between Leonard Woolf and Clive Bell. It was David (“Bunny”) Garnett who introduced the young Quentin to the world of nature, making biology the only science he understood.

Quentin's sister, Angelica, was actually a half-sister. Her father was Duncan Grant, a homosexual but very devoted nevertheless to Vanessa and her household. Garnett, one of his many lovers, later married Angelica. Clive Bell was devoted to the household in *his* way, and liked to constitute a paternal presence for Angelica. This must be one of the reasons why the Bells did not divorce. Bloomsbury's famous “tolerance” made certain feelings difficult, however. During Quentin's childhood, Clive had always been a “holiday father”: “We liked him when we saw him, but I cannot say we missed him when he was away.” Like the others – Roger Fry, Duncan Grant, Maynard Keynes – Clive did something to educate him, but exerted little or no authority. Later, Quentin was disturbed by the extreme conservatism growing out of Clive Bell's defense of “civilization,” which led to a sympathy with fascism and Nazism. These views became even more intense after World War II, when Clive persisted in denouncing Attlee as a Jew, thus eviscerating Quentin's already attenuated filial feelings.

Quentin Bell has written with loyalty and candor about the Bloomsbury figures who peopled his world from birth to manhood, when he left to go to the North of England and became a potter. One can imagine the tremendous power of these figures in the life of the vulnerable Bell children. Some were benign, like Keynes taking the young Quentin to the opera and to see the sights of London, or explaining the Peace Conference and the problem of German reparations. Other less benign effects grew out of the indifference inevitably produced by preoccupations of the “elders and betters,” and the “comfort of being so well loved” by Vanessa that brought with it “the pains of being so fearfully adored.” Although written with less tortured animus than Angelica's memoir, *Deceive with*



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EDITH KURZWEIL, EDITOR

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Kindness, Quentin's memories of the past are similarly sober and sobering.

The descriptions of childhood in *Bloomsbury* and *Charleston* rarely included other children or other relatives. Vanessa despised the Bell in-laws, there were no Stephen grandparents; cousins and other relatives were missing. Servants took the place of playmates. Quentin and Julian played together, but their schooling was erratic and they seem to have had very little *children's* experience. The children called their parents and other adults by their first names – a minor detail that conveys the tone of deliberately anti-Victorian manners of the pre-World War I period. (Similarly, Keynes, in letters of the period to Strachey and others, referred to the new monarch and his wife as “George” and “Mary” and speculated about their sex life.) Long after babyhood, the children were encouraged to go around naked and were frequently photographed in the garden or on the terrace, among the grownups who were all dressed. But when “Bunny Garnett” (b. 1892) wanted to marry Angelica (b. 1918), the child of his former lover, Vanessa found that she could not summon the sufficient degree of Bloomsbury tolerance.

Quentin Bell is now eighty-six. Clive Bell is dead, as are Vanessa, Duncan Grant, Roger Fry, Keynes, Forster, the Woolfs, and all the rest. Only he and Angelica and their families are still among us.

At the outset of his book, Quentin compares himself to “those figures upon the margin of a canvas pointing inwards toward the main subject of the picture.” If that puts one too much in mind of massive altar pieces in holy places, it is perhaps also the sign of Quentin's own vitality, that his observations are not swallowed up in the concentration on the center of the picture, and that he still believes in the usefulness of his *own* perceptions.

SONYA RUDIKOFF

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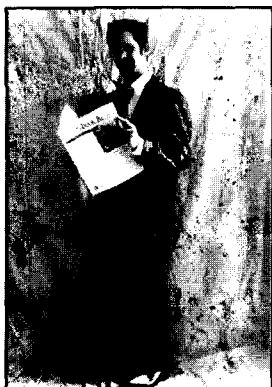
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the ailing Polish poet (in residence for the year at Berkeley in 1964) was the brainchild of Gregory Grossman (at Berkeley's Center for Slavic and East European Studies), who enlisted Czeslaw Milosz to record Wat's torturous memories. Wat found Milosz the ideal listener and felt that when they sat down with the tape recorder, Milosz was performing "an act of exorcism" on him. Thirteen years after these tapings, the eminent Lithuanian poet Tomas Venclova visited Berkeley and "rediscovered" the poetry of Aleksander Wat, who, to his astonishment, was "a major twentieth-century writer as yet undiscovered in the West." Twenty years later – despite the publication in English of two books of Wat's poetry, short stories (*Lucifer Unemployed*), and *My Century* – this brilliantly eccentric writer and intellectual remains nearly as unknown and underappreciated in this country. During Wat's lifetime, one Polish critic declared, "Perhaps there is nothing in his work except un-accomplishments," but it is the fragmentary nature itself of Wat's output reflecting "the cataclysmic nature of his disastrous times" that fascinates Venclova.

While the facts of Wat's shattered biography are, as Venclova puts it, "paradigmatic" of many East and Central European twentieth-century intellectuals, few writers have identified so closely with "the expectations, blunders, and disillusionments of modern times." Venclova makes an elegant and persuasive case for renewed attention to Wat's writing as well as to his profound, bold analysis of ideological and cultural trends, of which he was both an observer and targeted victim.

Wat's disjointed career was punctuated by a succession of spiritual crises, a thirty-year-long silence as a writer broken at age fifty-seven, and fourteen imprisonments for an array of trumped up charges. During World War II, Wat served time in Soviet prisons for allegedly being a Zionist, a Trotskyite, and even an agent of the Vatican. An agonizing long-term neurological illness, caused by a ruptured blood vessel in his brain during a stroke (which occurred just after he had been severely criticized for his attacks on social realism) a few weeks before the death of Stalin, shaped both his life and literary output for the last fourteen years of his life before his suicide in 1967.

Wat's poetry is imbued with religious issues, allusions, and images, and Venclova sensitively probes the attraction of both Judaism and Christianity to Wat's soul. Wat's Jewish lineage, described in an unfinished poem, "An Attempt at Genealogy," was impressive. The Wats (the real family name was Chwat) traced their ancestors to Rashi and Israel ben Shabbatia Hapstein of Kozienice, a Hasidic wonder-worker and preacher who had followers among Polish aristocrats. Other ancestral luminaries included the Gaon of Kutno and the original proponent of the Lurianic Kabbalah, Isaac ben Solomon Luria (known as the Lion or *ha-Ari*). Wat's father was

a deeply religious man who felt no compulsion to pass on his Judaism to his eight children. Wat felt he owed his first initiation into the “thrill of metaphysics and into poetry” to his adored family servant, Anna Mikulak, who frequently brought along the young Aleksander secretly with her to church for vespers. “Imagine,” Wat recalled decades later, “a boy from what was still a Jewish home surrounded by all those candles, that music!”

Wat’s disconcerting pronouncements on Judaism (“Judaism is a religion that must come to its end”) surface throughout *My Century*, and Venclova writes lucidly about Wat’s religious oscillations and putative conversion. What attracted Wat to Christianity, Venclova believes, was not its teachings but Wat’s strong identification with the figure of a suffering Christ. “Moreover, Christ became, in Wat’s imagination, an archetypal image of Jewishness and also of the Jewish fate.”

To Venclova, Wat was “a relentlessly eccentric soul, forever marginalized and excommunicated by society.” An exile both inside Poland and later in France and the United States, Wat was, throughout his life, an alien – a Jew who wore a cross around his neck, a Christian when he was in prison among observant Jews; a man imprisoned in prewar Warsaw for his Communist views and in wartime Alma-Ata for challenging the Soviet authorities and courageously refusing a Soviet passport. Like Czeslaw Milosz, Wat did not belong to any of the three major waves of Polish emigration, which placed him in a “chronological no man’s land,” and made his later poetry primarily a dialogue with himself.

Despite repeated internal and external exiles and attempts at conversion to his own self-styled amalgam of Christianity, Wat was, to his dismay, unable to escape the label of Polish-Pole or Jewish-Jew. His final break with his native land occurred in May 1967 when he made his last contribution to the Polish press, declaring his solidarity with Israel. “The new post-Holocaust wave of anti-Semitism in Poland,” Venclova explains, “was, for Wat, the ultimate disgrace,” upsetting the fragile balance between his Jewishness and Polishness.

Venclova’s primary interest is Wat’s poetry, which he writes about with great insightfulness, agilely weaving together Wat’s biography with analysis of all of Wat’s extant writing, including an unfinished novel entitled *Loth’s Flight*, that seems to have been “intended as an eastern European (and Jewish) answer” to Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus*. The novel’s theme of the surrender and destruction of intellectuals in the face of a totalitarian regime is one that clearly distressed Wat throughout his life.

Wat’s thorough description of his ill-fated Communist “adventure” and time spent in Stalinist prisons in *My Century* was complemented by his widow Ola’s (Paula) extensive writing about their life together, so one of the biggest difficulties Venclova faced was disentangling their myths,

sorting out discrepancies and distortions of perspective. Venclova's biographical detective work is superb, despite his lack of access to sources such as KGB archives, which might have helped reconstruct Wat's Communist activities in the 1930s and 1940s.

The discrepancy between Wat's relatively tiny output and his grandiose ambitions (which included solving the metaphysical problem of the source and nature of evil, and analyzing totalitarian society from the perspective of language) arose largely due to his being in continual disabling physical pain. "The devil behind my illness," Wat declared to Milosz, "is the devil of Communism." During much of his life in Poland, Wat was known primarily as a translator (he translated two of Ilya Ehrenburg's books) and fiction writer. In *Beginning With My Street*, Milosz explains that "for several decades Wat's high position in literary circles was actually the position of a talker rather than a writer," attributing Wat's long silence as a writer to his having been "struck mute" from the "vast store of knowledge he had accumulated about our century."

Wat believed his moral imperative duty was "to give a philosophical interpretation of the phenomenon that determined the course of his disgraced century" through means that were often startlingly original. Wat yearned, he explained, to "dance on the ruins . . . to smash the language into pulp, to fragmentize words so that their syllables make a new idiom of one's naked skin." Wat's long Dadaist prose poem, "Me from One Side and Me from the Other Side of My Pug Iron Stove" (1920), which Venclova refers to as "his war against sense," was one of the most radical avant-garde texts of its era, confirming Vladimir Mayakovski's assessment of Wat as "a born Futurist."

Wat's next work, *Lucifer Unemployed* (1927), a collection of catastrophic short stories, questions and nihilistically discredits morality, religion, love, and the idea of personality itself, in an attempt to show how intellectuals fell under the influence of totalitarian movements as a "global answer to negation . . . that hunger for something all-embracing." "Communism," he explained to Milosz in *My Century*, "arose to satisfy certain hungers. . . . One of those hungers was a hunger for a catechism, a simple catechism. That sort of hunger burns in refined intellectuals much more than it does in the man on the street."

Wat's unfinished essay, "Nine Notes Concerning a Portrait of Joseph Stalin," a critique of totalitarian reason, prefigures and complements his personal critique of Stalinism in *My Century* and his other autobiographical works, the as-yet untranslated (and presumably untranslatable) *Diary without Vowels* and *Scraps of Paper in the Wind*. Venclova observes that in "Nine Notes," Wat "carved out a niche at the intersection of linguistics and philosophy" with his exploration of "the profound semiotic psy-

chosis" at the root of Stalinist discourse, which gives birth to a "semantic Frankenstein, empty signs . . . that, in extreme cases, could inspire heroism and sacrifice."

Critic Stanislaw Baranczak sees Wat as a modern incarnation of Job, "not because he suffered more than the millions of other victims of the century's lunacies, but because he tried persistently to find a reason for his suffering." Another Polish critic (unnamed in this biography) decades ago proclaimed the work of Wat as "ruins, where blocks of noble metal lie scattered about." Yet to Tomas Venclova, these "ruins," are artistically and intellectually far ahead of their time. Wat prophetically understood his poetic mission when he explained in *My Century* that being a poet had little to do with "the no-doubt-meaningless fact of writing verse but rather a certain specific way of experiencing all experience, which also includes the workings of history. . . . Politics," he lamented, "is our destiny, a cyclone in whose eye we constantly are even though we take shelter in the frail craft of poetry."

SUSAN MIRON

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